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NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL Monterey, California



THESIS

PRESIDENT ASSAD'S FOREIGN POLICY

by

Antun Attallah

June, 1990

Thesis Advisor:

Ralph H. Magnus

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What the Syrians and their president want is precisely what nationalists have always wanted in every part of the world: an integrated (Syrian) society, which is industrialized, modernized, centralized, socialized and populated by proud and spirited masses; which enjoys the benefits of economic prowess; and which is capable of sustaining its independence in the anarchic, chronically unstable, pervasively violent and breathtakingly convulsive Middle East.

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President Assad's Foreign Policy

by

Antun Attallah
B.A., American University of Beirut, 1973

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

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June 1990

Author:

Antun Attallah

Antun Attallah

Approved By:

Ralph H. Magnus

Ralph H. Magnus, Thesis Advisor

John W. Amos, Second Reader

Thomas C. Bruneau

Thomas C. Bruneau, Chairman
Department of National Security Affairs

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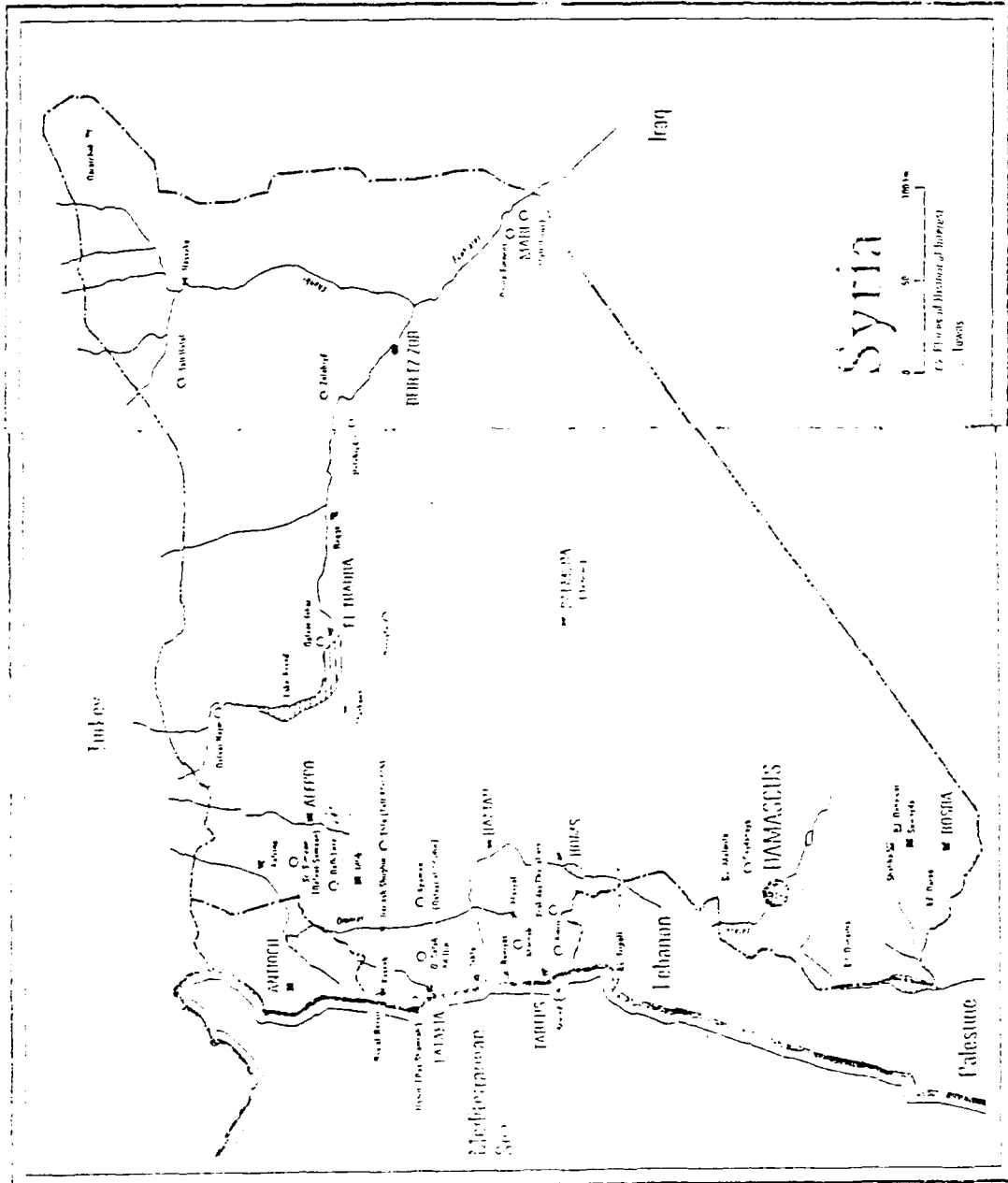
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Dedicated to:

My Family, Relatives, and Friends.

I. INTRODUCTION

This paper is a study of Assad's foreign policy and the factors that helped him consolidate his power and transform his country from a proxy state to a regional power. Syria's relations with its neighbors and the two superpowers will be discussed in detail.



II. SYRIA'S STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE

In terms of natural resources, Syria is hardly as important as other Middle Eastern nations like Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, or the countries of the Gulf. In terms of human resources, its ten million inhabitants hardly compare to the tens of millions of Egyptians, Iranians, and Iraqis. Yet, in terms of overall strategic significance, Syria is the prize of the region and, as Patrick Seal observes, no one can control the Middle East without ... having first gained control over Syria. There are two principal reasons for Syria's critical importance: its pivotal geographical position and its importance in the Arab and the Islamic Worlds as a religious, cultural, and intellectual center and a source of political ideas and movements. "Looking at Syria," says Seal, "is like examining a remarkable specimen in the Middle East political aquarium." Many of the political principles and trends in the Arab World today either originated there or could there be seen at work with special clarity.

Either the north-south axis or the east-west axis of Syria would by itself be sufficient to give Syria crucial regional importance. From north to south, Syria links Turkey and the peninsula of Asia Minor with Saudi Arabia and the oil-rich Arabian Peninsula. From east to west, it constitutes the natural corridor between the most powerful

nations in the Arab World, Iraq and Egypt.¹ Concerning natural or "Greater Syria", the peerless historian Philip K. Hitti notes,

"Especially because of the inclusion of Palestine and Phoenicia within its ancient boundaries, it [Syria] has made a more significant contribution to the moral and spiritual progress of mankind than any other comparable land. Small as it appears on a map or a globe, its historical importance is boundless; its influence is universal."²

To politicians and cartographers, Syria is an invention of the 20th century. To scholars, however, the term also refers to a once vast, occasionally powerful, always proud empire. Greater Syria, as historians call the broad area east of the Mediterranean, has a long and bloody past. The region, which included the territory of contemporary Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Israel, was situated at the approximate point where Europe, Asia and Africa converge. As such, it was a traditional meeting place and killing ground for peoples of both the East and the West.

Over the millenniums, Syria has repeatedly been overrun by conquerors from the desert or the sea: Canaanites, Phoenicians, Hebrews, Aramaeans, Assyrians, Babylonians,

¹Dr. Umar F. Abd-Allah, *The Islamic Struggle in Syria, Syria: Its Make-Up and Recent History, Its Strategic Importance*, Mizan Press, Berkeley, 1983, pp 29-30.

²Richard F. Nyrop, "Syria - A Country Study," *The American University, Washington DC Third Edition, First Printing, 1979, p. 3.*

Persians, Greeks, Romans, Nabatoeans, Byzantines, Arabs. During the seventh and eighth centuries A.D., Damascus flourished as the capital of the Umayyad Empire, which stretched from Spain to India. In the 12th century, the Crusaders' brief reign came to a violent end at the hands of the warrior Saladin, who remains a Syrian folk hero to this day. After Saladin's death, his domain fell to strong powers. Damascus was sacked and plundered in 1401 by Tamerlane, the Turkic conqueror, and in 1517 it came under the rule of the Ottoman Turks, where it languished for most of the next 400 years.

That period ended at last in 1920 when Syria became an independent monarchy under King Faisal I of the Hasemite royal family. But Britain and France were at work redrawing the region's boundaries. Faisal's sovereignty ended after only a few months when the French claimed Syria under a League of Nations' mandate. To weaken the Arab nationalist movement, the French created contemporary Lebanon by carving from Syria the Christian region around Mount Lebanon, Bekaa Valley and the coastal cities of Tripoli, Beirut, Sidon and Tyre and later on gave Alexandretta to Turkey and Mussel to Britain that merged it with present Iraq. In the same way, Britain claimed Jordan and Palestine also under a League of Nations' mandate. Even as they never forgave the Crusaders who overran their homeland, the Syrians have never absolved the French and the Britains for dividing their homeland.

After World War II, France reluctantly departed and Syria became an independent republic. The Syrians still celebrate April 17, the date of the 1946 French withdrawal, as Evacuation Day.

As with so many countries born in the past 50 years, Syria's modern history has been a saga of coups and counter-coups. From 1946 to 1958, the traditional Syrian politicians put Syria for adoption and squabbled and wrangled among each other for selecting the proper foster parent. In 1958, Egypt's president Gamal Abdel Nasser won the bid and merged his country with Syria to form the United Arab Republic but the union lasted only three and one half years. In 1963, the Arab Socialist Resurrection (Ba'ath) Party overthrew President Nazem Koudsi and seized power in Damascus.

III. ASSAD'S BIOGRAPHY AND HIS TACTICS IN SEIZING THE 'LEADERSHIP' IN SYRIA

After leading a bloodless coup in 1970, Hafez Assad took over. His name in Arabic means "Protector of Lion". He has trod through the carnage of Middle Eastern politics with the cunning and stealth of a big cat. He fought the Yom Kipper War, signed a disengagement agreement with Israel over the Golan Heights in 1974. He sent his army into Lebanon in 1976 to save the Maronite from Muslim forces. He told Time Correspondent Wilton Wynn in 1977 that he was ready to make peace with the Israelis if they would withdraw from the territory they had captured in the 1967 War. He sabotaged the Lebanese-Israeli peace treaty that U.S. brokered. He is disenchanted with U.S. diplomacy and believes that foreigners had trifled with Syria long enough.³ The political observers rate Assad as a first class statesman, strong ruler with great dreams of the past glory, trying to be Saladin's heir and successor. It is appropriate to shed the light on Assad's background and achievement in Syria.

Under the leadership of President Hafez Assad, Syria has been transformed from a weak, shaky and vulnerable country into an apparently strong and stable state, a regional power in the Middle East. Indeed, in a country which for generations had been torn by vigorous centrifugal forces and

³Time, Saladin's Shaky Successors, Dec. 19, 1983, p. 33.

jolted by military coups and counter coups, the Ba'ath Party has been able during the last two decades to establish an unchallenged, highly centralized reign in Damascus. Syria, which for decades had been an object of annexationist tendencies from several of its Arab neighbors and threatened by Israeli military might, has become under Assad's leadership one of the most influential, assertive powers in the region. Not only has Damascus managed to turn part of Lebanon into its protectorate and part of the PLO into its instrument, Syria has also challenged Egypt's Arab policy, Iraq's Fertile Crescent ascendancy, and Israel's military superiority, and it has threatened Jordan's rapprochement with Arafat's PLO. Finally, while securing massive Soviet military and strategic guarantees, but without becoming a Soviet client, Damascus has caused the USA to acknowledge its powerful position in the region.⁴

Hafez Assad is a native of the small town of Qardaha or (Kirdaha) in Latakia Province, Syria. According to an official source, he was born in 1930; other sources give the year as 1928. The oldest son of a farming family with modest land holding, he grew up as a member of the Alawite sect a secretive Shi'ite Islamic religious community concentrated in hillside towns clustered near the Mediterranean

⁴Moshe Maoz and Avner Yaniv, "Syria under Assad" The Emergency of Modern Syria, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1986, p. 9.

port of Latakia in Northwestern Syria and in sporadic villages in the central plain of Syria around the City of Homs. Alawites comprise about 13 percent of the Syrian population of ten million. They make up about half of the Syrian army and occupy most of the top posts in the armed forces and the ruling Ba'ath Party.

After completing his primary education at the Qardaha School, Assad attended the Latakia Secondary School, where he was a student in the scientific section. Early in his student years, he joined the Ba'ath Party, formally known as Hizb al-ba'ath al-arabi al-istiraki (Arab Socialist Renaissance Party). As a student activist, Assad was reportedly jailed for a time by the French, who occupied Syria until 1946, when the country attained full independence. In 1952, after completing his secondary education, Assad enrolled in the Homs Military College. Later, he studied at the Air Academy, from which he graduated in 1955 as a pilot officer with the rank of lieutenant. In 1958, he was sent to the Soviet Union for specialized instruction in night combat.

In 1957, the year after Syria merged with Egypt in the United Arab Republic under the leadership of Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, Assad was assigned to Cairo as a squadron leader in the UAR air force. There he and two other 'Alawi officers - Muhamad'Umran and Salah J'did founded and led a clandestine group of Syrian officers known as the Military Committee who were sympathetic to the Ba'ath

principles. The UAR was, however, not destined to last because the Union between the countries turned out to be not the Arab love affair projected in Ba'ath literature but the military overlordship of Syria by the Egyptian Army. Syrian soldiers, who became directly subordinate to Egyptian commands, were particularly alienated - especially officers who, on suspicion of being against union were ordered to Egypt and placed under surveillance, and in 1961, when the Syrians threw off the yoke of union, the Ba'ath Party which emerged as a leading force, was divided. Aflag and Bitar remained in control as founders, but the secret Ba'ath military committee was full of doubts about the civilian leadership. There lies a good circumstance that distinguishes Assad from the ordinary strongman. Not only does he represent a religious minority, and not only is he associated with a highly ideological political party, but he comes from a minority wing of that party which usurped power from the Party's founders.

Assad was a key figure in a coup d'etat staged by the Military Committee on March 8, 1963 that toppled the secessionists, brought the Ba'ath to power in Syria, and inaugurated an ambitious program of socialist reorganization. He was appointed Commander of the Syrian Air Force and elevated to the rank of General of Division in December, 1964. But the Ba'ath, unaccustomed to ruling, was plagued by a factionalism that erupted into another coup by a radical wing of the Party on February 23, 1966. The success of the

radicals seemed assured when Assad switched to their side, repudiating his allegiance to the moderate incumbents headed by Lieutenant General Amin of Hafiz. Following the removal of Hafiz from power, Assad was appointed Minister of Defense, at the same time retaining command of the Air Force. During the six-day Arab-Israeli War of June 1967, which ended with two-thirds of the Syrian Air Force destroyed on the ground and with Israel in control of about one-seventh of Syrian territory, Assad's military leadership was put to a severe test, and he regarded himself personally responsible for the defeat.

During the late 1960's, the Ba'ath Party was racked by a power struggle between its "military wing", led by Assad, and its "civilian wing", headed by Major General Salah J'did, a fellow Alawite officer and Assistant Secretary General of the Party. Assad gave priority to the goal of liberating the Israeli held territories and wanted to strengthen Syria's position after its 1967 military setback by trying to improve relations with other Arab countries and to win support for the Ba'ath program from the urban middle classes at home. His views were opposed as insufficiently revolutionary by J'did, who wanted the main emphasis placed on domestic economic development along Marxist lines, a policy favored by the USSR.

The two factions clashed openly on several occasions during the period from 1968 to 1970, but each time a

compromise was worked out that kept representatives of both camps in the leadership, Assad's attempt to seize control of the government in a coup in February, 1969 was thwarted by Soviet threats to cut off all military and economic aid to Syria if he succeeded. Syria's intervention in the fighting that broke out in Jordan in September, 1970 led to the ultimate clash between Assad and J'did. When Syrian troops tried unsuccessfully to aid Palestinian commandos battling the forces of Jordan's King Hussein, Assad blamed J'did's faction and President Premier Nuredin el-Atassi for what he considered a risky misadventure. They in turn criticized Assad for not providing air support for the Syrian troops, a move that in his view would have dangerously widened the conflict. When J'did tried to oust Assad, the latter was able to command the loyalty of the army and to take control of the government on November 13, 1970 in a bloodless coup. He then ordered J'did into exile in Egypt.

As Syria's new Premier and strongman, Assad appointed a new leadership for the Ba'ath Party and proclaimed a "corrective movement" to eliminate the mistakes of his predecessors. Martial law was repealed, the news media were given freer reign, and other civil rights measures were enacted. Regulation of foreign trade was liberalized and Syrians were allowed to travel abroad without restrictions. To encourage the return of skilled Syrians living in other countries, Assad lifted restrictions on the holding of funds

in foreign banks by Syrian nationals. He also granted amnesty to a number of political exiles who had left the country during the series of coups that had convulsed Syria since 1946.

On the economic front, Assad launched a five-year development plan, including the construction of a large dam on the Euphrates that would greatly increase the number of farms under irrigation. Although the state continued to own the large industries and banks, Assad encouraged private enterprise in tourism, construction, and transportation. Wages and family allowances were raised, and the prices of such essentials as tea, coffee, sugar and flour were reduced.

Unlike his predecessor Salah J'did, Assad has neither shared authority with his comrades in a collective leadership nor held the reigns of power from a modest position, such as Assistant Secretary General of the Ba'ath Party. Once he determined to assume control, Assad worked systematically to realize full authority. After a brief transitional period of holding the dual positions of Prime Minister and Defense Minister, Assad formed a new presidential system early in 1971. Under Syria's permanent Constitution, promulgated on January 31, 1973, the president (Assad) was bestowed with extensive political and military powers as well as substantial legislative authority. For example, being elected for a seven-year term (Article 85),

the president establishes the general policy of the state and supervises its application (Article 94). He nominates one or more vice presidents, the president of the Council of Ministers, the ministers and assistance ministers. Moreover, he undertakes responsibility for receiving their resignation, or for dismissing them (Article 85). "The President of the Republic declares war or calls for general mobilization" (Article 100); he is the "supreme leader of the army and armed forces...." (Article 103); he "appoints civil and military functionaries and ends their services in conformity with the law" (Article 106). "The President of the Republic promulgates the laws passed by the Council of People. He has the right to oppose the laws by a reasonable resolution..." (Article 98). He is entitled to "dissolve the Council by a justified resolution he promulgates" (Article 107); he "exercises the legislative authority during periods of prorogation in the intervals between...two councils..." and "during sessions in cases of necessity pertinent to the national interests of the country" (Article 111) and he "has the right to refer important questions, related to the interests of the country, to citizens. The results of the referendum are obligatory..." (Article 113).

The constitution gives the president almost unlimited control of the country. Assad exercises this control through the formal institutions of the State: the presidency, the cabinet, the government machinery, the

armed command, as well as the Council of People. To these, one should add Assad's leadership of the Ba'ath Party, which is, according to the constitution (Article 7), "the leading party of the society and state" - as Secretary General of both its regional and national commands. He also dominates the "National Progressive Front", the coalition of the Ba'ath and three left-wing and national parties or groups. Not content with exercising his authority through the official government institutions and the party machinery, Assad exerts his power simultaneously through other channels as well. One of these is the team of advisors in the presidential office who is separately assigned to political, military, security and economical affairs, and who applies certain supervisory functions over the government machinery. A more important pivotal body is an unofficial group, called the Jama'a (company), which is mainly composed of the founding members of Assad's regime and his current core team.

The major tasks of the Jama'a are to assist Assad in safeguarding the regime against its enemies, in exercising effective control in the country and in tackling critical issues in Syria's domestic and foreign policies from a level above the regular government machinery. Although there have been rivalries and rifts between certain members of the Jama'a, notably between the president's younger brother, Rif'at Assad and Mustafa Tlas, the Defense Minister, most

if not all members have been completely loyal to Hafez Assad. Among those of special importance in the Jama'a are the commanders of the elite army units assigned to protect the nerve centers of the regime, such as the presidential palace, radio and television stations, airports and the like. The conspicuous units are "Defense Companies" and "the Special Forces", which are stationed near Damascus and equipped with their own helicopters, planes, artillery and other modern material. One of these units is commanded by Assad's brother, who was elected in 1975 to the Ba'ath National Command. In 1984, Rif'at was appointed a vice president, and one of three, in an attempt to contain his ambition to succeed his then ailing brother. Other weighty members of the Jama'a are officers in charge of the major combat divisions of the Syrian army and the various military intelligence services, notably Air Force Intelligence, which has greatly helped Assad in both his ascendancy and rule.

What also helped Assad, "the Supreme Commander of the Army", wield a power that is most crucial to the regime's stability is that he personally appointed a large number of officers as commanders, or to other key positions of the select combat units. The criterion for their selection, as for the choice of the top government ministers, is that they are personal, Alawi-communal and Ba'ath-partisan friends, relatives or comrades. Among these are a number of Sunni-Muslim personalities, such as Defense Minister Mustafa Tlas

and Chief-of-Staff Hiknat Shihabi, whose loyalty to Assad are beyond doubt and at the same time they are not more than figures. Within the officer corps, however, the number of Alawis holding various command positions - the substructure of Assad's regime - greatly exceeds the proportion of Alawis (13 percent) in the total population. The famous 70th Armored Brigade, assigned to protect the regime's centers, was under the command of Izzat J'did, a close relative.

From the outset, Assad has systematically endeavored to avoid an image of his regime as being based on confessional military support, or a junta of Alawi army officers. He adopted measures to emphasize the people's participation in shaping his regime. In May, 1973 (and again in August, 1977), Syrian citizens elected their first National Council (Parliament), which previously had been an appointed body. Representatives of several parties as well as "independent" delegates have successively been elected to the National Council. With the Ba'ath Party, these older parties - the Communist Party, the "Socialist Arab Union" and the "Arab Socialists" - formed in 1972 a "National Progressive Front" under the initiative and direction of Assad.

The outstanding moves made by Assad since his ascendancy have been directed at appeasing or neutralizing the conservative Sunni Muslim circles, particularly the religious leadership. In 1971, Assad restored to the Syrian constitution the previous formulation of the presidential

oath, "I swear by Allah Akbar", which had been replaced by a secular format ("I swear on my honor and my faith") in the 1969 constitution. In the Permanent Constitution of March, 1973, he reinstated the paragraph establishing the religion of the president as Islam; this had been deleted previously from both the 1969 constitution and the draft Permanent Constitution. Assad has made other gestures to underscore his public image as a faithful Muslim, such as publicly participating in prayers and religious ceremonies at various mosques, distributing honors among Muslim religious leaders (ulama), raising them in rank and salary, and nominating the prominent Alim as Minister of War in the government. Assad's own authenticity as a Muslim was verified by Sunni Muslim ulama, including the Mufti of Damascus, Ahmad Kaftaru; and he succeeded in having the leader of the Shi'ites in Lebanon, the late Imam Musa al-Sadr, certify that the Alawis are Shi'ite Muslims. Thus Assad has shown his awareness of the importance of Islam as the majority religion and as a value shared by the entire Syrian population.

It appears that all these maneuvers and flexibility failed to satisfy the Sunni Muslims in general and the Muslim Brotherhood in particular whose strong opposition to Assad's regime culminated in February 1982 when they initiated an armed rebellion in the city of Hama and took control of the city after killing tens of government and

and military personnel. In reaction, elite units of the Syrian army fiercely shelled the city, destroying large parts of it and killing an estimated 30,000 inhabitants, men, women and children. The opposition movement, guided and led by the Muslim Brotherhood underground organization, represents not only the conservative and fundamentalist elements, who have struggled since 1963 against the allegedly secularist, anti-Islamic, sectarian Alawi regime. This opposition has represented in the last two decades or so other sections of the population, mostly city dwellers, whose socio-economic interests and/or political-civil rights and beliefs have been hurt or violated by the Ba'ath regime. Among these are many members of the traditional urban middle class or merchants and artisans, many of them conservative Muslims, who resent both the socialist, secularist measures of the regime as well as its disposition to develop the rural areas, allegedly at the expense of the cities. The latter grievance is also shared by not a few urban intellectuals, professionals and other members of the intelligentsia, who complain bitterly about the suppression of their basic political and civil liberties.

But the Ba'ath derives its power and support from large sectors of the Syrian population who have benefited from the regime or that share the Ba'ath concepts. Besides the Alawi, Druze and Isma'ili minorities, many thousands of Sunni peasants and urban workers have significantly improved

their socio-economic conditions under the Ba'ath regime. In addition, there are thousands of members of the intelligentsia who support the regime out of interest or belief. For the last two decades, many thousands of youngsters have been educated and indoctrinated in Ba'athist ideology, and many of them are ardent supporters of the regime. All these groups and sectors may in the long run constitute the new and cohesive political society and a solid basis for the Ba'ath regime. In a future struggle between such socio-political forces and the conservative urban Sunni Muslim sections of the population, the former are likely to have the upper hand.

Finally, here are some of Assad's personal qualities and political skills that largely account for the preservation of his position. His appearance, tall and grave, his conduct, calm and cool, and his dignified bearing all bespeak a strong personality, which is manifested, inter alia, in his determination, consistency and stubbornness. He possesses an air of authority and confidence, acquired during his military career. These qualities make him a natural leader, and with his traits of modesty and honesty, also make him a popular idol with whom ordinary people readily identify. In addition, Assad is a shrewd politician, with an instinctive cautiousness, patience and realism - which possibly stem from his peasant minority background. He is a systematic, though slow, thinker and

has rare habit of listening to others and learning from his own mistakes.⁵ He is a cautious and pragmatic leader who nonetheless appreciates the uses and limits of brinkmanship. Unfailingly courteous, the Syrian President inevitably begins meetings with a disarming jest before buckling down to what can become six hours of hard negotiating. "He gives his thoughts away bit by bit, like peeling an onion," says a Western diplomat. "He will just keep talking until you get tired." He has a superb grasp of detail and rarely refers to notes. On the other hand, he prefers to speak in generalities that sometimes are so ambiguous that diplomats leave his presence scratching their heads. His decision making can be equally mysterious. After listening expressionlessly to his small knot of Western-educated advisors, Assad usually retires to read voraciously about the question at hand, then flatly announces a decision, often by telephoning an aid late at night. Neither a smoker nor a drinker, Assad, the father of five children, lives quietly with his wife Anisa in a heavily guarded palace in Damascus.⁶

In politics, Assad plays what has been called an "open game", always preserving as many options as possible. If he

⁵This analysis is derived from two main sources:
a) Moshe Maoz and Avner Yaniv, "Syria under Assad," pp 25-34. b) The New Yorker, "Letter from Syria," by Joseph Kraft, June 17, 1974, pp 92-105.

⁶Time, "World", December 19, 1983, p. 32.

uses violence to achieve his goals, whether overt force or covert means, there is nothing impetuous about it. Calibration is the characteristic of Assad's famous ruthlessness. Usually he gives his adversaries and his allies room to back away from confrontation, and when he does make a move the risk and the likely response appear calculated with extraordinary care. "You must remember this about Hafez Assad," said a Christian Lebanese politician who has negotiated with him often, and warily, "he never completely embraces his allies and never definitely breaks with his enemies---he is a master of suspense, a Hitchcock of policy."⁷

Assad's word is a bond. For nearly two decades, Israeli intelligence officers and academics have studied his words for clues "and when he does, he means what he says." Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin calls him "the best enemy Israel has." What he means is that while it's almost impossible to reach an accord with him, Assad keeps his word when an agreement is made - like one holding Israeli and Syrian troops apart in the Golan Heights.

That Assad has lasted 20 years is no small feat in a land of which a former Syrian president, quoted in the New York Times Magazine (May 18, 1975), said of his countrymen,

⁷Foreign Affairs, "Assad and His Allies: Irreconcilable Differences," by Christopher Dicky, Vol. 66, No. 1, Fall 1987, pp 59-62.

"Fifty percent of the Syrians consider themselves national leaders, 25 percent think they are prophets, and ten percent imagine they are gods."⁸ These characteristics, together with his deep and intimate knowledge of the Syrian political scene and his keen interest in inter-Arab and global politics, have made Assad a politician and a statesman of national, regional and, to some extent, international standing.

There is a consensus among the political observers that the strength and success of Assad's regime derive from three other important factors: The Alawi community, the Syrian Army and the Ba'ath Party. In the few following pages, these factors would be analyzed as a prior step to the discussion of Assad's foreign policy.

⁸World Report, "Is the Protector of Lions Losing his Touch?" by John S. Lang, November 10, 1986, pp 28-29.

IV. THE ALAWI COMMUNITY: ITS RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

The Alawis are known by another name - The Nusairis. The Nusairis take their name from Abu Shu-aib Muhammad Ibn Nusair an-Numairi (c.ca.270 Islamic Era, 883 Common Era), who is reported to have attended the circles of the last three Imams (Islamic spiritual and religious leaders) of the prophet's line according to the Imami Shi'ah doctrine of the succession of Imams: Abu-'l-Hasan 'Ali al-Hadi ibn Muhammad al-'Askari (214-54 A.H., 829-68 C.E.), Abu Muhammad al-Hasan ibn 'Ali al-'Askari (230-60 A.H., 844-73 C.E.), and Muhammad al-Mahdi ibn al-Hasan al-'Askari (b.255 A.H., 868 C.E.). The teachings and declarations of ibn Nusair brought him into conflict with the Imams who repudiated and cursed him and warned their followers of the greater danger (Fitnah) of his teachings. Ibn Nusair claimed for himself exclusive authority to interpret the teachings of the Imams by virtue of a special relationship to them. He proclaimed himself the "Bab" (door, that is, the sole means of access to the esoteric knowledge of the Imam in the Imam's absence) of the Imams and their "Hujjah" (manifest proof, that is, the heir to their knowledge and their sole representative), and Shi'i and Sunni sources alike add that he rejected the Islamic doctrine of the finality of prophecy and declared himself a Prophet (Nabi) and Prophet-Messenger (rasul).

Thus the Nusairis emerged as the followers of Ibn Nusair, repudiated by the very Imams whom they claimed to be following. "Nusairi" is their religious and historical name, which they have carried for centuries. They have sometimes been confused with partially similar groups in Anatolia and Kurdistan, with whom they have held in common the belief that 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, the close companion, first cousin, and son-in-law of the Prophet, was a divine incarnation. This confusion is in part responsible for the recent designation of the Nusairis as 'Alawis, because the incarnationist groups in Anatolia have traditionally been known as 'Alawi (Alevi, in Turkish spelling) and those in Iran as 'Ali-Ilahis ("deifiers of 'Ali"). The name "'Alawi" was never applied to the Nusairis until the orientalists began using it as a designation for them in the 19th century. They were not officially known as 'Alawis until September, 1920, when the French occupational forces instituted the policy of referring to them by that name.

In terms of overall beliefs, the Nusairis have much in common with the Isma'Ilis, and they are sometimes regarded as an offshoot of this group. Like the Isma'Ilis and related groups, the Nusairis are extreme esoterics (batinis) who contend that the Shari'ah (Islamic law) has both an esoteric, allegorical (batini) meaning and an exoteric, literal (Zahiri) meaning and that only the hidden meaning is intended. The esoteric meaning, according to Nusairi belief,

is known only to the Imams and was hidden even to the Prophet himself. Only the Bab has access to this esoteric meaning in the absence of the Imam, which gives the Bab a rank second only to the Imams and in Nusairi belief superior even to the Prophet. Because Ibn Nusair claimed to be a Bab and a Prophetic Messenger as well, he used his esoteric authority to abrogate prayer (Salah), Zakah (alms) al Sawm (fasting), al-Hajj (pilgrimage), and other fundamental religious obligations as being contrary to the esoteric (batini) meaning of the Shari'ah and, according to Shi'i and Sunni sources, permitted a number of things strictly prohibited in Islamic law such as wine drinking. Nusairi women are never allowed to learn the religious teachings for fear that they would expose them to others, and women do not take part in Nusairi religious practices because the Nusairi teachings are highly secretive. The teachings are only learned through a long process of induction and initiation, which begins for suitable males at the age of 19. The majority of the Nusairi community is never inducted into knowledge of the full teachings, which privilege is reserved to a select elite, the process of selection has clear Isma'ili parallels and is also strikingly similar to masonic rituals of induction and initiation.

The Nusairis believe in a holy trinity, the secret formulaic (Kalimat as-sirr) which consists of the Arabic

letters 'Ain-Mim-Sin (, ,) which stand for the three persons of the trinity. 'Ali, Muhammad, and Salman al-Farisi, the Persian companion of the prophet. Each of these three is said to have been an incarnation of God. 'Ali, however, constitutes the most important part of this trinity. He is called al-ma'na (the esoteric meaning) and the prophet Muhammad, who is called al-ism (the outward esoteric meaning) is said to have been created from 'Ali's light. Salman al-Farisi, who is called the Bab, is the sole means of access to the esoteric meaning represented by 'Ali and consequently is superior in that sense to Muhammad. These conceptions are expressed in the Nusairi testimony of faith: "I have borne witness that there is no God but He, the most High, the object of worship [al-'Ali al-Ma'bud] and that there is no concealing veil (hijab) except the lord Muhammad, the object of praise, (as Sayyid Muhammad al-Mahmud)), and there is no Bab except the lord Salman al-Farisi." The Nusairis believe in the subsequent incarnation of God in other persons after the passing of 'Ali, Muhammad, and Salman al-Farisi. They differ among themselves, however, on whether this incarnation was partial or total, and on whom were these divine incarnations. Thus the Nusairis as a whole believe that each of the 12 Imams of the Imami line of succession was an incarnation of God, but some exclude the prophet and Salman al-Farisi as incarnations of God and restrict the phenomenon to 'Ali and

the Imam, who descended from him, while others include Ibn Nusair as a divine incarnation.

Nusairi ritual and belief involve the worship of sacred springs, trees, and the like - practices believed to be rooted in Phoenician paganism. The worship of stars and other celestial bodies is also a central part of Nusairi ritual. One of the fundamentals of Nusairi belief connected to these practices is the reincarnation and transmigration of souls, a belief that is also tied to their rejection of the principal Islamic article of faith, the physical resurrection of the dead and the Last Judgment. According to Nusairi belief, all human beings originated as celestial bodies but assumed their present form as a consequence of the Fall,⁹ as they believe that sinning Alawis become Jews, Muslims or Christians.¹⁰ The successive reincarnations and transmigrations of souls will end in their restoration as celestial bodies. 'Ali is believed to be the "Prince of the Stars" and, according to some Nusais, is embodied in the Moon. But the incarnation of God is the most fundamental Nusairi belief, and consequently, is referred to as the "greatest of all divine secrets." In connection with this belief, the Nusairis partake of bread and wine in a ritual

⁹Dr. Umar F. Abd-Allah, This analysis is quoted from Chapter 1, "The Nusairi Sect," pp 42-48.

¹⁰Middle Eastern Studies, Vol. 20, No. 2, The Alawi Community of Syria, April 1984, p. 135 by Mahmud A. Taksh.

strikingly like the Christian rite of the Last Supper. The Nusairis deem the bread and wine to constitute the body and blood of the incarnate God. They observe and celebrate the Christmas according to the Greek Orthodox rites and calendar. They also partake of wine on the occasion of the Persian New Year festival and call the wine "'Abd-an-Nur" (the servant of the light [God]), because God has manifested his presence in it.

Religiously, the Nusairis are divided into three main sects: Shamsis, Qamaris and Murshidiyyin. The Shamsis (a derivative of Shams or sun, the astral symbol of Muhammad), a section of detribalized Nusairis, form a minority in Syria and are said to pay more reverence to the Prophet Muhammad than to 'Ali, his cousin and son-in-law. The majority section, the Qamaris (after Qamar or moon, the astral symbol of 'Ali), allegedly regard 'Ali as the ma'na or "meaning" of the divinity as we have mentioned before. The Murshidiyyin split off from the Qamaris and are followers of Sulayman al-Murshid, a humble shepherd. Al-Murshid claimed prophetic powers in 1923 at the age of 17 and on that account and for seditious proclivities, suffered death at the hand of authorities some 23 years later. His sect attracted many adherents and spread widely among the tribe of al-Khayyatin.

Tribally, the Nusairis are split into four main tribes: al-Haddadin, al-Khayyatin, al-Kalbiyyah, and al-Matawirah. Hafez al-Assad and his blood relations belong to the

Numailatiyyah section of al-Matawira. Assad's sect, the traditional Qamaris, is led by Sulayman al-Ahmad, who is usually referred to as "the Bedouin of the Mountain" (Badawi al-Jabal) and carries the official title of "Servant of the Prophet's Household" (Khadim Ahl-il-Bayt). He has his center at Qardahah, Assad's village, and belongs to Assad's section, the Numailatiyyah, of al-Matawirah tribe.¹¹

What does their religion mean to the Nusairis? Since many of its tenets are closely guarded and the Nusairis refuse to discuss them with outsiders, and since only a few initiates are privy to such knowledge, the doctrine and theology of the religion remain a mystery for even the ordinary Nusairi. As a result, the common folk have developed strong beliefs in amulets, magic and Ziaras (visitations to the grave sites of certain religious Shaykhs). Also common is the belief in Khadr, a holy savior who may reveal himself on occasion in corporeal form, but in essence is divine. As to the educated, non-initiated Nusairis who are now the mobilized stratum of the Nusairis community, they maintain that their religion means little to them because they lack any knowledge about it.¹²

¹¹The Middle East Journal, Vol. 35, "Some Observations on the Social Roots of Syria's Ruling Military Group and the Causes for its Dominance," by Hanna Batatu, Summer 81, pp 331-335.

¹²Mahmud F. Faksh, p. 136.

It should be mentioned parenthetically that the leaders of the Nusairis deny any connection or affinity with astral-agnosticism or other deviations from conventional Shi'ism. In a formal proclamation issued in 1973, 80 religious personages, representing the various parts of the Nusairi's country, unqualifiedly affirmed that their book is the Qur'an, that they are Muslim and Shi'i, and, like the majority of Shi'is, Ithna 'Ashariyyah or Twelvers, that is, partisans of the 12 imams, and that whatever else is attributed to them has no basis in truth and is a mere invention by their enemies and the enemies of Islam. In this connection, it is significant that when General Salah J'did, Syria's 'Alawi strongman in the second half of the 1960s, voiced apprehensions at the rise of sectarian feelings in the country and his Isma'ili Minister of Information, Sami-j-Jundi, suggested, as an answer to the problem and a check to the suspicion nursed by the other communities, the publication of the secret books of the 'Alawi sect, J'did sharply rejoined: "If we did this, our Shaykhs would crush us."¹³

From an Islamic standpoint, then, the religious beliefs and practices of the Nusairis ('Alawis) set them off as a distinct religion, neither Islamic, nor Christian, nor Jewish, and it has always been the consensus of the Muslim

¹³Hanna Batatu, p. 335.

"ulama", both Sunni and Shi'i, that the Nusairis (Alawis) are Kuffar (disbelievers, rejectors of faith) and idolators (mushrikun).¹⁴

¹⁴Dr. Umar F. Abd-Allah, p. 48.

V. THE ALAWI RISE TO POWER

The two major national organizations that were instrumental in the Alawi rise to power and eventual control of political life in Syria were the Ba'ath Party and the military. With respect to the former, many educated Alawis and members of other religious minorities, such as the Druze and Isma'ilis, found the Ba'ath most appealing, as they sought to free themselves of minority status. The secular ideology of the Ba'ath may explain why a higher proportion than their representation in the population at large joined its ranks. The notion of a secular state, socialist political system, advocated by the Ba'ath, was extremely attractive to minorities. Such a system would certainly weaken the traditional Sunni-urban establishment's hegemony in Syrian political life and, consequently, would eliminate the prevailing political and socio-economic discrimination against heterodox Muslim minorities. The Ba'athist secular national ideology regarded them as full Arab Syrian nationals, irrespective of religion, and admitted them to unfettered party membership. They were allowed to be active in party politics and to compete for power with other groups on an equal basis both regionally (in the Latakian region) and nationally.

The Ba'ath Party, like most Syrian parties, reflected the traditional paramountcy of regionalism in political life. Consequently, the party's disproportionate expansion in

the Latakia region gave the Alawis a strong base from which to gain power in the region in the 1950s and in the nation later.

When the Ba'ath Party came to power in a coup d'etat by a group of Ba'athist army officers on March 9, 1963, the Alawis were able, from their firm organizational regional base in Latakia, to increase their strength in the party and to position themselves in less than three years in high party and government positions. They triumphantly controlled the party and national politics between 1966 and 1970 under Alawi General Salah J'did, and now do so under Alawi General Hafez-Assad, who has been president since February 22, 1971. This marked a radical change in the composition of the Syrian political elite.

After 1963, the way was opening for persons from the rural lower strata and minority groups to be at the forefront of Syrian political life, which, in turn, would bring about drastic socio-economic and political benefits for the rural poor and members of religious minorities who had previously been ignored. This can also be shown more accurately by examining the composition of the Regional Commands of the Ba'ath Party, which became the center of political power after March, 1963. Table I reveals that Alawis, among religious minorities, had the strongest representation since 1966, reaching its highest (23.4 percent) between 1966 and 1970 when Alawi General Salah J'did held the party reins.

TABLE I

Sectarian Representation in the Syrian
Commands of the Ba'ath Party
(1963-1978)

Regional Command No.	1-4	5-8	9-11	1-11
Period	9/63-2/66	3/66-11/70	11/70-11/78	9/63-11/78
Religion	% (No)	% (No)	% (No)	% (No)
Sunni	54.0 (27)	51.6 (33)	69.6 (39)	58.2 (99)
Alawi	14.0 (7)	23.4 (15)	21.4 (12)	20.0 (34)
Druze	20.0 (10)	9.4 (6)	3.6 (2)	10.0 (18)
Isma'ili	10.0 (5)	9.4 (6)	- -	6.5 (11)
Christian	2.0 (1)	6.3 (4)	5.4 (3)	4.7 (8)
Total	100.0 (50)	100.0 (64)	100.0 (56)	100.0 (70)

Source: Nikolaus Van Dan, *The Struggle for Power in Syria*, London, 1979, Table 5.

During the J'did period, there was no representation at all of people from Damascus, Aleppo and Hama; the predominantly rural areas of Latakia, Hawran and Dayr al-Zur together accounted for 65.6 percent of the entire roster of the Regional Commands. The inclusion of many Sunni members from Damascus (25.0 percent) in 1970-78 only indicates the desire of Alawi General Hafez Assad to win this important urban segment to his side in order to lessen the Alawi regime's isolation from the critical urban masses. It was a tactical political move, designed to pacify the capital city, but not to set in motion the trend toward enhanced Sunni-urban participation. The same treatment was not extended to Aleppo, the other Sunni-urban center, which was kept isolated and had no representation at all during the same period.

The other and more important national organization that many educated, mobilized Alawis and other religious minorities were attracted to and through which they came to powerful positions in national political life is the army. They flocked to it in numbers far greater than their percentage of the population. As they rose in rank, the Alawis in particular became a significant component of the Syrian officer class. The Alawis, Druze and Isma'ilis who together represent about one-sixth of the population, are better represented in the armed forces, both among the officers and the enlisted men, than is the Sunni majority.

There are a number of reasons for the non-representativeness of the Syrian army. First, the French had encouraged minority recruitment as a means to counter the nationalist tendencies of the Arab-Sunni majority and to secure the allegiance of the minority communities. Second, minority groups came mainly from economically less developed rural areas and were, therefore, attracted by the economic opportunities and social advancement of a career in the army. Third, following independence, the Sunni townsmen, who had led the Arab nationalist struggle against the French, indirectly reinforced the trend toward overrepresentation of minorities in the army; they avoided sending their sons to military service by paying a redemption fee (badal 'askari) or refused to let them join the army as a profession. They considered the military academy at Homs as "a place for the

lazy", the rebellious, the academically backward, or the socially undistinguished. It was certainly not a fit place for the sons of Sunni-urban, middle- and upper-class families, who could afford to provide university education or to subsidize business ventures instead. The minority, rural poor saw the military academy as a doorway to social advancement and economic security. All this meant that the urban Sunnis no longer held the upper hand. The situation within the army was well described in a 1949 report: All units of any importance as well as the important parts ('anasir) were under command of persons originating in [religious] minorities.

After the coup of March, 1963, minority officers, especially Alawis and Druze, became more active as a group in the ensuing power struggle among Ba'athist army officers. They spearheaded a minoritarian-rural, radical-revolutionary faction against the moderate lower-middle-class Sunni Ba'athist officers. The end came in a bloody takeover in 1966 by the minoritarian-rural-radical faction, which cemented its control. The event marked an important change in Syrian post-independence history; control of the Syrian army and Syrian political life had passed to the heterodox Muslim minorities, led by the Alawis; the Sunni majority was in a subordinate, inactive position. In 1966 and 1968, the Alawi faction terminated the other two minoritarian-sectarian factions (the Druze and the Isma'ilis), and became the master of Syria. Since then, the Alawis discriminated

against the Sunnis in the armed forces, have given preference to their co-religionists in appointments and promotions, and have shown favoritism in the development of their home region - all of which have bolstered the communal solidarity that has helped to maintain their dominance.

The rise of poor people from the rural and religious minority areas in Syria since early 1963, and the eventual control by the Alawis of the reins of power starting in 1966 are manifest in the regional and sectarian backgrounds of military members of the Syrian Regional Commands of the Ba'ath Party, which are the leading indicators of power in the army and in the party. Between 1963 and 1978, officers from the predominantly Alawi region of Latakia had the highest representation (49.0 percent) among all military members; the traditionally Sunni regions of Damascus and Aleppo had only 5.7 percent each. In terms of religious minoritarian background, Table II shows that Alawi officer representation increased from 30 percent in 1963-66 to 42.1 percent in 1966-70, and to 42.9 percent in 1970-78. During the same periods, Druze officers declined from 25 percent to none; the Isma'ilis went from 10 percent to 15.8 percent and dropped to none in 1970-78. The Alawis were clearly the preponderant minority force in the Ba'athist military structure.

Although between 1970 and 1978 Sunni officer representation in the Ba'ath Regional Command (57.1 percent) outnumber

TABLE II

Sectarian Background of the Military Members of the
Syrian Regional Commands of the Ba'ath Party
(1963-1978)

Regional Command No.	1-4	5-8	9-11	1-11
Period	9/63-2/66	3/66-11/70	11/70-11/78	9/63-11/78
Religion	% (No)	% (No)	% (No)	% (No)
Sunni	35.0 (7)	42.1 (8)	57.1 (8)	43.4 (23)
Alawi	30.0 (6)	42.1 (8)	42.9 (6)	37.7 (20)
Druze	25.0 (5)	- -	- -	9.4 (5)
Isma'ili	10.0 (2)	15.8 (3)	- -	9.4 (5)
Christian	- -	- -	- -	- -
Total	100.0 (20)	100.0 (19)	100.0 (14)	100.0 (53)

Source: Nikolaus Van Dan, *The Struggle for Power in Syria*, London, 1979, Table 6.

that of the Alawi (42 percent), the figures do not tell the story about actual power in the armed forces. First, Sunni officers come from various regions, and have no common ties and interests to support the sectarian loyalty that would help knit together a regional-sectarian bloc, as is the case with the officers belonging to territorial compact minorities. Sunni officers neither represented nor led strong army factions to contest the supremacy of Alawi officers. They could act only on an individual basis, not as a group. Second, only Alawi officers were trusted" because of communal ties with the important strategic, political and intelligence positions in the armed forces. They also commanded key army strike units and special forces stationed close to or around the capital, Damascus, while many Sunni officers were

assigned to less important units in faraway regions. A few Sunni officers are kept in high positions to satisfy the different Sunni elements and to dispel the impression that key military posts are held mainly by Alawis. Such officers have no independent power nor a base of support from which to muster strength of their own within the armed forces. They remain as long as they act in line with Assad's policies. Third, during this period, Assad cooperated with leading Sunni Damascene Ba'athist officers in an effort to win Damascus to his side. They were given high representation (21.4 percent) in the military structure of the Regional Commands of the Ba'ath, but the outlying traditional Sunni towns of Aleppo and Hama had no representation at all. These were the two main areas where major Sunni opposition to Alawi hegemony was strong and violent.

The increasing Alawi domination of political life in Syria since 1966 has had two major antithetical and polarizing consequences. On the one hand, it has strengthened Alawi cohesion and consciousness, with attendant discrimination against Sunnis, especially urbanites. On the other hand, it has engendered Sunni reaction and opposition, spearheaded by the urban-centered movement of the Muslim Brotherhood (al-Ikhawan al Muslimun).¹⁵

¹⁵This section ('The Alawi Rise to Power' is quoted and derived from Mahmud M. Faksh, pp 140-145.

VI. THE SYRIAN IDEOLOGICAL PARTIES

Since her inception as a political entity, Syria has witnessed the rise of three ideological parties - the Hizb al-Ba'ath, the Hizb al-Qawmi al-Suri al-Ijtima'i (SSNP), and the Syrian Communist Party which competed for the loyalties of Syria's high school and college students particularly after the independence.

In this paper, our concern would be of the first two parties, because of the important roles that they have played in the Syrian political life. These parties found fertile ground for recruitment, notably in Latakia area, especially among Christians and Alawis. One of the important reasons that helped these parties flourish in the Latakia area is that poverty minority status heightened most high school students' resentment toward wealthy landowners and the existing order. Small 'Alawi tobacco farmers were forced to sell their crops to Sunni entrepreneurs on the coast, often for inadequate remuneration. The 'Alawis could not change this situation by ousting a few people as in Hama; a basic social and political revolution was required in their society.¹⁶

Although both the SSNP and the Ba'ath recruited ex-peasant, lower middle class groups in the Latakia area,

¹⁶Michael H. Van Dusen, "Political Integration and Regionalism in Syria," the Middle East Journal, Volume XXVI, Spring, 1972, p. 122.

and although the Ba'ath outlived the SSNP, the latter was initially far more successful in this region. The SSNP started recruiting in the late 1930s and the party was immediately popular among both Christian and 'Alawi groups. By the mid 1940s, the SSNP was well entrenched, particularly in the Christian Safita district where the party maintained some of its own high schools.¹⁷

The competition between the Ba'ath and the SSNP was great, and high school students of all faiths were usually attracted to one of the two parties or both. While the SSNP was popular among both Christians and 'Alawis, the Ba'ath appealed mostly to 'Alawis and to some Sunnis on the coast. By the 1950s, the Ba'ath and the SSNP were sending equal numbers of their members to the officer corps and university, a situation which, of course, changed with the mid 1950 crackdown on the SSNP.

After Shishakli's eclipse, the army had regained its influence on Syrian's government and had again become an important factor in the country's politics. The two groups which were competing most vigorously for the officers' loyalties were the Ba'ath and SSNP. The ideological struggle between these two parties was very strong. On April 22, 1955, Lieutenant Colonel Adnan Malki, the Chief of the Third Bureau of the Syrian army staff, was assassinated by Yunis

¹⁷ibid , Michael Van Dusen.

Abd-al-Rahim, a sergeant who happened to be a member of the SSNP. What followed could be called a mass persecution of the SSNP. Army officers with links to the party were purged, the immunity to its deputy to parliament was lifted, and a trial involving charges of treason and conspiracy was instituted. The proceedings were definitely political despite the outward forms of legality observed by the authorities. The legal proceedings notwithstanding, it was not certain that Malki's assassination was an act of premeditated conspiracy. Certain evidence pointed to personal motives, and the connection of the assassin with the SSNP might have been coincidental.¹⁸

The result of this incident was that the Ba'ath Party with their cooperation with Egyptian protege Abdul Hamid Saraj and his Cabal succeeded to launch a purge movement against the SSNP and its goal of creating a Syrian nation state comprised of present Syria, Jordan, Palestine, Lebanon, Cyprus and Alexandretta. In other words, the ideology of Arab nationalism defeated the ideology of pan-Syrianism.

Since 1966, when the Alawis consolidated their supremacy in Syria, all signs indicate that Syria is going in the direction of pan-Syrianism. In the following few pages we are going to demonstrate some main excerpts of the constitutions, programs and teachings of the two aforementioned parties. We start first by the SSNP.

¹⁸George Lenczowski, "The Middle East in World Affairs," Fourth Edition, 1980, p. 338.

VII. THE SYRIAN SOCIAL NATIONAL PARTY

Antun Sa'ada (1904-49), the founder of Syrian regional nationalism, was the son of a physician of Greek Orthodox faith who migrated to South America. Saadeh returned to Lebanon in 1929, and for a time tutored German at the American University of Beirut. He developed the idea that the Syrian nation differed from the Arab nation and consisted of a unique historical synthesis of Arabs, Phoenicians, and other groups who lived in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, and part of Palestine and who therefore must be united under the flag of Greater Syria. This nation would form a homogeneous society in which traditional group loyalties, feudal land relations, and capitalism would be abolished and religion separated from the state. These ideas, which Saadeh regarded as scientific national philosophy and made mandatory learning for his disciples, were embodied in a program that formed the ideological basis of the Syrian Social National Party and had a lasting impact on the thinking of some Arab intellectuals. The party began as a secret organization in 1932 and was discovered by the authorities in November, 1935. Saadeh and his lieutenants were arrested, charged with plotting against the state, and sentenced to prison. The SSNP attracted both Muslim and Christian Arab intellectuals, for its prime purpose was independence and the assertion of national identity. After 1945, the idea of a Greater Syria, which was the

backbone of Saadeh's nationalism, no longer appealed to the Christians of Lebanon who feared that they would be lost in the Muslim majority. Nor did the idea appeal to Muslim Arab nationalists, who had begun to think in terms of a union of the entire Arab-speaking world. It appeals to those groups who are interested in maintaining Syria's national existence and making it the center of a large Arab political entity. It also appeals to extremist secularists, including some Christian, 'Alawi and Druze Arabs, who feel that neither Islam nor any other religion should be made the basis of nationalism, since they consider national bonds, such as language and history, stronger than religion.¹⁹

It may rightly be said that Saadeh's condemnation of feudalism and his call for economic progress and social justice formulated within the context of secular nationalism and corporatism have been preserved and reshaped under the new ideology of Arab socialism. There is a striking similarity between the principles of the Syrian party and the writings of some contemporary socialists. Saadeh's missionary appeal on behalf of independence left its imprint on all subsequent Arab revolutionary movements. Many of Saadeh's

¹⁹Kemal H. Karpat, "Political and Social Thought in the Contemporary Middle East," The Principles of Syrian Nationalism and its Party, Paraeger Publishers, U.S.A., 1982, pp 51-52.

followers joined the Ba'ath. In recent years, the party was legalized and moved to populism and revolutionism.²⁰

A. THE REFORM PRINCIPLES OF THE SSNP

The following principles embody the constitution of the party.

1. The First Principle.

Separation between religion and state. Saadeh declared that the religious institutions are great obstacles in the way of national unity and national welfare too. The principle of divine right is a dangerous one and has enslaved many people to the point of exhaustion.²¹

2. The Second Principle.

Prohibition of the clergy from interference in the political and judicial matters of national concern. This principle is implied by the previous one. It is stated here explicitly to put an end to the indirect interference by religious institutions in the course of temporal and political affairs with the hope of directing matters in favor of their interests. Saadeh said, "It is necessary, therefore, that the Social Nationalist state have a unified judiciary and one system of laws." For this unity makes the citizens feel and know that they are equal before the law.²²

²⁰ibid.

²¹ibid., p. 53.

²²ibid., p. 55.

3. The Third Principle.

Removal of the barriers among the different sects.

Saadeh said,

"Undoubtedly there are, among the different sects and denominations of our nation, traditional barriers not necessitated by religion. These discordant traditions derive from the organizations of our religious and denominational institutions and they have exercised a tremendous influence in weakening the social and economic unity of the people and delaying our national revival. As long as these traditional barriers remain, our calls for freedom and for independence will continue to be cries of pain and signs of ineptitude. We must break down these barriers in order to render social unity a deep-rooted fact, and to set up the Social Nationalist order which will bestow health and power upon the nation."²³

4. The Fourth Principle.

The abolition of feudalism, the organization of national economy on the basis of production, the security of the rights of labor, and the protection of the interests of the nation and of the state. Saadeh said,

"The Syrian Social Nationalist Party wants to realize a strong national unity in which the Syrian nation may be enabled to persist in the struggle for life and progress. This national unity cannot be realized within a bad social order. Therefore, the realization of social-legal justice and economic-legal justice are two necessary prerequisites for the success of the Syrian Nationalist Movement."²⁴

5. The Fifth Principle.

Preparation of a strong army, which will have an effective role in defending the country and in determining national destiny. Saadeh said,

²³ ibid., p. 55.

²⁴ ibid., p. 56.

"The competition for the resources of life and supremacy among nations is a question of struggle between national interests. The vital interests of a nation cannot be protected in the struggle except by force in its two manifestations, the material and the spiritual. Now, spiritual power, no matter how perfect it may be, is always in need of material power. In fact, material power is itself an index and manifestation of an advanced spiritual power. Hence, it follows that an army and the military virtues are essential bases for the state. It is our own power that we trust in attaining our rights and in defending our interests. We intend to persevere in the struggle for existence and for supremacy in life, and life and supremacy shall be our reward."²⁵

6. The Aim and the Program of the Party.

The aim of the Syrian Social National Party is the creation of a movement which will realize its principles and revivify the nation, and the establishment of an organization which will lead to the complete independence of the Syrian nation, to the affirmation of its sovereignty, the setting up of a new order capable of protecting its interests and raising its standard of living, and the endeavor for the formation of an Arab front.²⁶

It is plainly manifest from the wording of this article that national revival is the center of the attention for the SSNP. The rise of the Social Nationalist Movement involves the realization of nationhood in Syria, the protection of the life and interests and means of progress of the

²⁵ibid., p. 58.

²⁶ibid., p. 58.

Syrian nation, and equipping it with the power of strong union and true national cooperation.²⁷

Saadeh mentioned frequently that Syria is one of the Arab nations and is qualified to play a leading role in the Arab World. Concerning the Arab front, Saadeh said,

"We shall never relinquish our position in the Arab World nor our mission to the Arab World. But we want, before everything else, to be strong in ourselves in order to convey our mission. Syria must be strong in its own national revival before it can undertake the realization of its greater task."²⁸

After this short simple coverage of the SSNP, we move to the following step of covering the Ba'ath Party.

²⁷ibid., p. 58.

²⁸ibid., p. 59.

VIII. THE IDEOLOGY OF THE BA'ATH PARTY

Michel 'Aflag and Salah al-Din al-Bitar, two French-educated Syrian high school teachers, founded the Arab Resurrection Party (henceforth referred to as the Ba'ath - meaning resurrection party) in Damascus in 1940. As both a theory and a political organization, the Ba'ath has played a crucial part in the contemporary history of the Arab World, particularly in Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq.

'Aflag was born in Damascus in 1912, to a Greek Orthodox Christian family that dealt in grain. He studied in Paris, where he became a communist, but after he returned to Syria and became a secondary school teacher, he turned against communism.²⁹ Sensitive and austere, 'Aflag is more a talented intellectual than a political leader. A poor public speaker, he is at his best amidst a small circle of followers discussing ideology. There is much of the suspicious, nervous artist in his conduct. Credulous and even vain, he is vulnerable to praise and duplicity. When ill-advised, he makes grave mistakes, for he has "the innocence of childhood and the caution of old age". He is a personality of contradiction complicated by a strange mixture of weakness and strength. His stubbornness is normally unyielding except where one finds access to his heart. Hateful when insulted, 'Aflag's demeanor

²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 138.

gives an impression of laziness though he has a full life. In a very real sense, "the party was an expression of his humanity and reflected from its early days his talents and his weaknesses."³⁰

'Aflag, as a philosopher of the Ba'ath party, sought to formulate an Arab nationalist ideology which would resolve the Arab problems. He defined the Arabs in terms of language, history and personal self-identification with the Arab nationalist movement. Religion does not enter the definition. For 'Aflag every nation has an idea, an essence, which operates throughout history. The Arab essence is spiritual and is reflected in Islam, which is a manifestation of the Arab idea. Islam is, in effect, contained within Arabism.³¹

The Ba'ath program implies a separation of religion and the state, unlike so many constitutions of the Arab states which declare Islam as the state religion. Nationalism is to be the only tie in the unified Arab state, and religious and other modes of exclusiveness are to be suppressed.³²

³⁰International Journal of Middle East Studies, Vol. 3, No. 1, The Rise of the Syrian Ba'ath, by Nabil M. Kaylani, January 1972, p. 7.

³¹Journal of International Affairs, Vol. 34, No. 1, Student Notes: The Ideology of the Ba'ath Party and Syrian Politics, Marc J. Sievers, Spring/Summer, 1980, p. 188.

³²The Middle East Journal, Vol. XXIII, The Ba'ath Ideology and Practice, by Gordon H. Torrey, p. 449.

'Aflag states that "The Arabs today do not want their nationalism to be religious, because religion has another aspect, a field which does not bind the nation but which, on the contrary, divides a single people although there is no fundamental difference between the religions." However, since Islam is so much a part of Arab culture, he is in a difficult position on this facet of Arab nationalism. 'Aflag's answer is that Islam must now conform to Arabism rather than shaping it as it did in the early days of Islam. Since the Arab resurrection will only include those aspects of Arabism that are compatible with the modern world and will adapt others through changes, Islam itself must change to meet the requirements of the new age. Arab nationalism is not to be constrained by the narrow limits of Islam which is only an aspect of the larger movement.³³

Islam, in a sense, ended as a moral and unifying influence among the Arabs when it spreads beyond the pale and included non-Arabs. 'Aflag recognizes Islam as an element in Arab nationalism, but on condition that it must subordinate itself to the secular nationalist movement. In other words, Arab nationalism has replaced Islam as the driving force of the Arab people. Absolute equality before the law for all citizens is to be laid down as a fundamental constitutional right; thus, all public offices are theoretically open to any

³³ibid., p. 450.

citizen regardless of creed. Education is to be secular, free and compulsory, with all private educational institutions suppressed.³⁴

'Aflag states that, "the great service rendered by Islam to Arabism in the past could not be repeated in the 20th century since the problems challenging Syria were not essentially religious but political and social." The measures in the social and political fields were envisaged strictly in secular terms and this in practice was a radical departure from the spirit of Islam and its socio-economic concepts. Thus, in the last few years - that is to say, since the Ba'ath coming to power - 'Aflag and the Ba'ath in general have often been described as godless and as enemies of religion.³⁵

A. CONCEPTS IN THE PARTY CONSTITUTION

The dominance of the Arab nationalist ideal in Ba'athist thinking is made readily apparent in the Ba'ath Constitution. The Constitution is prefaced by the slogan: One Arab nation with an immortal mission, the Arab Resurrection Socialist Party, a popular national revolutionary movement striving for Arab unity, freedom and socialism.³⁶

³⁴ibid., p. 450.

³⁵Kernal H. Karpat, p. 140.

³⁶Gordon H. Torrey, p. 447.

According to Ba'athist doctrine, the Arabs are one nation possessing an indivisible political, cultural and economic unit which belongs to them alone. The Arab nation possesses special characteristics, which although long suppressed, are capable of being resurrected.

The Constitution states that the Arab nation's special characteristics include "vitality and creative powers". These characteristics make possible its revival and development and are the mystique of Arab nationalists everywhere. Without this hope of resurgence, Arab nationalism would not exist.

'Aflag's historical studies and his acquaintanceship with 19th century German philosophy are brought out in the program's section on the "immortal mission" of the Arab nation. This mission is to revive human values, encourage human development and strive for peace and cooperation with other nations toward the common goal of comfort and prosperity for all peoples.³⁷

According to 'Aflag, Arab history is characterized by alternating periods of decline and renewal. At this stage in history, the mission of the Arabs is the realization of Arab unity. 'Aflag maintained that the experience of struggling for unity would bring about the structural transformation, or Inqilab, in the spirit and thinking of the Arab people which would revolutionize their society. This was to be achieved

³⁷ ibid., p. 447.

through relentless struggle against reactionary elements with vested interests in the anachronisms of the status quo, and other political groups who were considered to only feign nationalism while being in reality opposed to the national welfare. 'Aflag laid down three essential conditions for the Inqilab: (1) Awareness of the historical and contemporary realities which called for drastic transformation; (2) a feeling of responsibility rooted in a strong moral base; and (3) a genuine belief in the feasibility, at the existing stage of Arab history, of the proposed Inqilab. These conditions were to be fulfilled by al-Tali'a (the vanguard) who constituted the membership of the Ba'ath. "The struggle which I designated as the practical expression of the Inqilab," wrote 'Aflag, "creates its own crusaders." The Inqilab becomes a living thing in their souls, minds and manners or it becomes life itself. Once achieved, the Inqilab would presumably usher in the Ba'athist trinity: unity, freedom and socialism.³⁸

Of the three parts of the trinity, the first is primary. Once Arab unity is attained, freedom and socialism will follow. Whatever degree of freedom and socialism attained prior to Arab unity must necessarily be incomplete. Socialism is necessary in order to liberate the energies of the Arab masses, and so allow them to take part in the Arab resurrection. Freedom is found in conformity with the

³⁸Nabil M. Kaylani, p. 5.

general will. The achievement of unity and socialism creates freedom.³⁹ An insight into 'Aflag's thinking on this is provided in a passage of his Ma'rakat al-Masir al-Wahid (The Struggle for One Destiny). 'Aflag wrote that the party was named the

"Arab Resurrection Party not only because it was the first party to believe ideologically and practically in Arab unity and to place its organization on a universal Arab foundation, but also because it believed that any viewpoint or remedy of the vital difficulties of the Arabs, either in part or in toto, which does not emanate from the axiom 'The Unity of the Arab People' is an erroneous outlook and an injurious cure."

The difference of the Ba'ath from other Arab political parties is in kind, not in its Arab nationalism or its socialism, but in its universality. The various national parties in the Arab states did not measure up to the challenge of Arab unity. Neither did the Arab League. Arab unity is a basic, daily, ordered and continuous struggle and not something to be attained automatically or "some day" when political conditions are ripe. It is not a result of the struggle of the Arab people for independence or socialism but a goal to be simultaneously struggled for. However, unity comes first because it is spiritual.⁴⁰

Central to 'Aflag's thinking is the quest for freedom, conceived not merely as emancipation from political tyranny and oppressive poverty, but the liberation of the Arab

³⁹ Marc J. Sievers, p. 188.

⁴⁰ Gordon H. Torrey, p. 448.

people, unified in mind and spirit, joined together in social brotherhood. Freedom should, therefore, emanate from the very soul of the Arab and be cherished as an indivisible part of his cultural heritage. Here again, the path to freedom is that of struggle strewn with sacrifice. Since such a generic conception of freedom could not be achieved or even promoted without state action, especially in the education of the masses, the political machinery of the state had to be freed from the grip of the privileged classes, considered to be custodians of the feudal past, and intrinsically opposed to the idea of the Inqilab. For that purpose 'Aflag and his supporters advocated the prompt implementation of a radical program of socialism designed to eradicate the economic power, and hence political domination, of the big landowners, business and commercial magnates and give the people a stronger sense of belonging to society through direct ownership of land and plant.⁴¹

Every action based on principle was to be geared, in the final analysis, towards unification of the Arab World - the paramount objective of the Ba'ath. Without unity, the Arabs could not possibly recapture their former glory and become once again creative agents in human civilization. Ba'athism, however, disparages any unity that is achieved by military force or through agreement among political leaders regardless

⁴¹Nabil M. Kaylani, p. 6.

of their intentions. True unity can only be the result of a spiritual Inqilab in Arab society. Only then, would the Arab people in separate political regions realize that they constitute one nation.⁴²

'Aflag called upon the Arabs to fight imperialism by every means. He considered imperialism "a crime". He disparages the various national movements which have risen out of colonialism to combat the ills of Arab society. Among these ills are feudalism, regionalism, sectarianism and intellectual reaction. He charges that one quality unites all of these movements - negativism. They are the sum which rises to the surface in the feebleness of present Arab society. Civilization must be built and human values cultivated. The Ba'ath goal is not confined to driving the colonizers out and uprooting the internal exploiters, or even to achieving the freedom and prosperity of the Arab people. They are but means to assuring a universal role for the Arabs, together with the peoples of Asia and Africa.⁴³

'Aflag goes to great lengths to define his concept of Arab nationalism and distinguish it from other views. He stigmatizes the version of Arab nationalism which is restrictive state nationalism and which divides the Arabs. Furthermore, he condemns what he terms "racial nationalism" - that

⁴²ibid., p. 6.

⁴³Gordon H. Torrey, p. 448.

which claims the Arabs to be superior - a type of thinking which he finds no different than Nazism with its overtones of racial superiority and oppression of minorities. He stresses the humanitarianism of Arabism. Likewise, he does not proclaim Arabism to be international, which is one of the great differences between it and communism. Communism, according to 'Aflag, is an attempt to bind everyone with synthetic economic bonds. He feels that this would fail as did the religious state, by its inherent contradictions. 'Aflag praises Tito's Yugoslavia because it was the first "socialist" country to cast aside communist internationalism in favor of nationalism.⁴⁴

B. BA'ATH SOCIALISM

Article 4 of the 1947 Ba'ath Constitution states that socialism is necessary for Arab nationalism, being the system which would allow the Arabs to develop their inherent potentialities. Socialism will enable the Arab nation to increase its production and strengthen its bonds. Believing that wealth in the Arab countries is unjustly distributed, the program calls for its "fair distribution" among the citizens. However, there is no call for a general nationalization of capital. In line with generally accepted view among socialists, public utilities, major national resources, and large

⁴⁴ibid., p. 449.

scale industrial and transport services would be nationalized. Foreign-owned concessions and company rights would be cancelled. Land reform is envisioned with the size of plots limited to that which the owner can work without "exploitation of the efforts of others".⁴⁵

A dissertation on these socialist principles is found in FiSabil al-Ba'ath where 'Aflag declares that "socialism means that all citizens should share in their country's resources with the intention that they better their life and consequently the life of their nation, because man does not accept his rendering of himself as an end in life." However, he states that there are no separate doctrines of socialism and nationalism but that they are "fused into one entity". It is significant that the Ba'ath has declared that although it believes in socialism because it would realize social justice, the party would embrace another social system if it found a better one.⁴⁶

'Aflag claims his socialism does not have the materialistic objective of "feeding the hungry and clothing the naked", but the higher one of freeing man's talents and abilities. This means a destruction of the influence of the traditional aristocracy of wealth which has ruled the Arab countries for generations, so that lower classes may break out of the

⁴⁵ibid., p. 450.

⁴⁶ibid., pp 450-451.

economic grip which has held them in a depressed state and which has blocked their political influence. Thus, he rejects the communist definition of socialism in the works of Marx and Lenin. The Ba'ath socialism is proclaimed to be a new form of nationalism.⁴⁷

In its vision of Arab unity, Ba'athist socialism envisions bringing together those Arab countries whose progress is obstructed by their lack of capital and natural resources with their better endowed brethren who would share their wealth.⁴⁸

The Ba'ath's attitude toward real estate holdings is spelled out in the party's program. Ownership of buildings is to be limited to what can be personally used. "Exploitation by means of renting is forbidden." A reference in the Constitution to the state guaranteeing a minimum ownership of landed property for all citizens would seem to indicate that private home ownership, as well as agricultural plots, is to be encouraged.⁴⁹

Usury, so prevalent in most parts of the Arab World, is to be abolished. However, interest on money at a reasonable rate is to be allowed. A government bank for agricultural and industrial projects is envisioned; it would issue a currency backed by "national production".⁴⁹

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p. 451.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p. 451.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 451.

Trade, in all of its forms, is to be controlled by the state. A reference to the maintenance of equilibrium between exports and imports seems to hark back to economic nationalism and autarchy, or merely shows a lack of economic sophistication. Following on the path of trade restrictions is the concept of a directed economy for the Arab countries and their industrialization. Another interesting aspect of the Ba'ath economic policy is worker participation and profit sharing in the management of factories, apparently along the lines now practiced in Yugoslavia.⁵⁰

The internal disarray in the Arab World necessitates a far-reaching social "revolution"; according to Ba'athist teachings, the Arabs do not have time to wait for evolutionary progress, especially since the more advanced countries will continue their rate of progress and make catching up impossible. 'Aflag lays great stress on a revolution of spirit, especially in the moral and intellectual realms.⁵¹

The sixth article of the program ends with ringing exhortation "to raise in revolt against corruption in all spheres of intellectual, social and political life". Thus, the Ba'ath is not only pushing for a resurrection of Arabism, but for revolution, not evolution, in the fullest sense of the term, a forced reformation of the social and political

⁵⁰ibid., p. 451.

⁵¹ibid., p. 451.

structure of the Arab counties which ousts old ideas and a decadent spirit. As 'Aflag states, "the gap and disfigurement in the Arab nationalist structure can only be bridged by a violent wrenching away from the present situation."⁵²

In 'Aflag's eyes the Arab nation's interior is "rotten", filled with social injustice, exploitation, ignorance, weakness in thought, and lacking in tolerance and love. Thus, the Arab people must not only struggle against imperialism and Zionism (another form of imperialism), but against themselves.⁵³

Michel 'Aflag has taken great pains to differentiate his movement from communism. Besides his thesis that Arab socialism is an amalgam of nationalism and socialism, he stresses other points of difference. Socialism under the communist system - since it is a universal theory and strives to complete world revolution - cannot carry out a sufficient economic readjustment until it achieves worldwide revolution. Thus economic conditions in the communist countries are influenced and restricted by this goal. This includes preparation for war and competition with other nations. 'Aflag has declared that the communist states pursue a bloc policy and "help imperialism".⁵⁴

⁵²ibid., p. 452.

⁵³ibid., p. 452.

⁵⁴ibid., p. 452.

Under the heading of "Theoretical Differences Between our Socialism and that of the Communists, 'Aflag wrote:

"Socialism in the communist system is not limited only to the organization of the economy; it must obey the ends and aims of communist system. Communism, as a universal doctrine, aims in effect at worldwide revolution and can only henceforth be applied if this revolution is an entire success. On the other hand, as long as the revolution is not at an end, the economic system of a communist country will remain subject to aims and directives of the policy of the communist movement, including preparation for war and competition with other countries."⁵⁵

Arab Ba'ath socialism, on the contrary, limits itself to organizing the economy so as to redistribute the wealth of the Arab World and to establish a basis for an economy guaranteeing justice and equality among all citizens, and also to promote a revolution in production and the means of production.⁵⁶

Another difference with communism is its belief in materialism and disregard for spiritual principles and the small value placed in the individual. As 'Aflag says, "it permits the slaughter of the individual for the sake of its material existence," because in communist theory, society is the root. This outlook leads to dictatorship and a mechanical, materialistic society lost to the spirit. His socialism, however, is based on the individual and allows his personal freedom. Another point of difference is the right of

⁵⁵Kemal H. Karpat, pp 144-145.

⁵⁶ibid., p. 145.

ownership. According to 'Aflag, "communist socialism went to the utmost limit and did away with the right of possession, and thus destroyed personal and instinctive motives in the individual." Ba'athism preserves this right, but it limits it fairly narrowly.⁵⁷ Under the heading of "Theoretical Differences Between our Socialism and that of the Communists," 'Aflag wrote: "Communist philosophy is based on belief in materialism. It explains historical and social evolution solely and wholly by economic factors, which results in its changing its philosophy and spiritual beliefs." The philosophy of the Arab Ba'ath does not agree with this materialistic conception. On the contrary, it considers that the "spiritual" factor plays a very important part in the evolution of history and human progress. Consequently, it considers that the spiritual influences that have appeared in the Arab World, such as Islam, are in no way strange.

Being materialistic, communist philosophy accords only little importance to the individual; it does not respect him and it scorns his freedom. It is concerned only with the mass. This conception leads to dictatorship and the creation of a materialistic society completely lacking in spirit. This philosophy similarly results in a lack of balance between the individual and society and between Arab societies and others. Our socialism, on the contrary, is based on the

⁵⁷Gordon H. Torrey, p. 452.

individual and his personal freedom; it does not allow his individual liberties to be scorned and considers all individuals as equal and a tyrannical dictatorship unnecessary.⁵⁸

'Aflag continued his criticism under the heading of "Practical Differences Between our Socialism and that of Communism". He wrote: "Communist socialism has gone too far in the direction of nationalization; it has abolished property rights and consequently has killed all individual initiative." Ba'ath socialism, on the contrary, believes that the main strength of a nation resides in individual initiative which encourages action; it is careful not to abolish private property, there limiting itself to the creation of strong impediments to abuse.

Communism does not recognize the right of succession. Our socialism, on the contrary, recognizes it and believes that a citizen cannot be deprived of it. Nevertheless, to prevent the wrongful use of the national wealth and exploitation of labor, we have imposed certain changes that make this right in certain cases almost theoretical and that reduce it in other cases to a simple moral right.⁵⁹

'Aflag extended his criticism to National Socialism. Under the heading of "Differences Between our Socialism and National Socialism - Theoretical Differences," 'Aflag wrote:

⁵⁸Kemal H. Karpat, p. 145.

⁵⁹Ibid., pp 145-146.

"The National Socialism of Germany and of Italy is linked to Nazi and fascist philosophy, based on the idea of racial superiority and on the difference between peoples, i.e., on the superiority of one kind over another and their right to dominate the world. These philosophies likewise establish differences between nationals of the same nation, which leads to the dictatorship of an individual or of a class. True socialism cannot succeed in such a system."

"Ba'ath socialism is inspired by its own philosophy, does not despise other nations, and does not aim at domination. It is an end in itself, to procure economic and social benefits that are easily achieved. It does not cloak political or denominational ambitions."⁶⁰

Under "Practical Differences", with National Socialism, 'Aflat wrote:

"Subjected to Nazi and fascist regimes, National Socialism in Germany and in Italy is closely linked to their aims; expansion and colonialism. These aims can only be achieved, therefore, by territorial expansion. Thus, National Socialism is only a means to imperialism. Ba'ath socialism, on the other hand, does not aim at expansion. Its sole aim is to create a fair economic system in the Arab World. It supports all that tends toward the liberation of peoples still under colonial rule. It desires that other peoples may practice socialism and follow an economic policy that gives justice to all and a higher standard of living for all peoples, at the same time conserving the individuality of each."⁶¹

Closely intertwined with the Ba'ath's economic views and its Arab nationalism are the party's domestic program and what it terms its social policy. In line with the considerable emphasis on the role of the individual, Ba'ath doctrine envisions a democratic state of the parliamentary constitutional type with the executive responsive to the legislative organ.

⁶⁰ibid., p. 147.

⁶¹ibid., p. 147.

In contrast with what has been the practice in the Middle East, parliament is to be elected directly and freely by the people. The unified Arab state is to be decentralized and judicial authority is to be independent of the other arms of the government.

Absolute equality before the law is guaranteed to all citizens, as is freedom of expression. However, these appear to be abridged by the addition of the clause so often found in Middle Eastern political documents - "within the limits of the law". All religious, sectarian, tribal, racial and regional "factions" are to be fought. Military service is to be compulsory.

Under "Social Policy" the family and children are recognized as a trust and are to be protected. Marriage is a national duty to be encouraged and facilitated by the state. This probably refers to breaking down some of the existing barriers to marriage, especially the custom of bride price.

In consonance with socialist thinking, medical care is to be provided free by the state. The full employment doctrine is embraced in the section of the program devoted to the role of labor. A minimum wage is alluded to, as are disability benefits, paid vacations and old age pensions. Free trade unions for workers and farmers are to be encouraged and special labor tribunals are to adjudicate labor disputes.

In conformity with the Ba'ath's thesis of awakening the Arab people, the Program includes a special article relating

to the encouragement of Arab culture in all of its aspects. Likewise, private organizations and political parties are to be given opportunities to function. The Constitution also reiterates a continued theme in Ba'athist rhetoric, namely freedom of expression by the individual and the press. However, this may be circumscribed by the higher Arab national interest.

Reflecting the backgrounds of the Ba'ath's founders, special reference is made to the position of mental labor; it is placed on a par with its physical counterpart and is to be protected and encouraged, as is academic scholarship.

As in the case with socialist dogma everywhere, class differences and their distinctions are to be abolished. This applies, not only to economic classes, but to those paragons of Arab civilization - the bedouin. In Ba'ath's eyes they are an embarrassment which retards progress and they must be eliminated by sedentarization. In order to bring the new order to the Arab World, the Ba'ath envisions the creation of a new generation by means of education.

The Program's pronouncement on foreign policy is a ringing denunciation of imperialism and foreign influence in the Arab countries. A sweeping renunciation of all treaties and agreements concluded by the Arab states limiting Arab sovereignty is to be made. Despite this tone of belligerency, the Arabs are to cooperate with other nations in creating a harmonious, free, secure and progressing world.

The Ba'ath's continual emphasis on the role of the individual, his freedom of expression and action and his opportunity to develop himself continually, seems to conflict with another basic Ba'athist concept - the Arab nationalist movement. In his writing 'Aflag warns of the dangers of tyranny of the group over the individual; yet almost in the same breath he speaks of the supremacy of the Arab nationalist movement. Since Ba'athist ideology obliges the Arab citizen to recognize and participate in the mission of Arab nationalism, no Arab can stand aside from this struggle. Thus, it would seem that individual freedom must be circumscribed for the benefit of the immortal mission, no matter how much the rights of the individual are stressed in Ba'athist ideology. Arab nationalism must take precedence, since it is history being carried out and, thus, it is inevitable and supreme. Here is a basic conflict between 'Aflag's 19th century national liberalism and the influence of 20th century nationalist totalitarianism. 'Aflag attempts to reconcile this conflict by stressing that the individual through education will be awakened to the necessity of conforming to the nationalist movement. Until the people reach this point, however, they must be led by the enlightened men who have reached the higher state where their own interests and those of Arab nationalism are one. Bitar and 'Aflag contended that the party could not be a mass movement, since it would be weakened by dilution. On the other

hand, Bitar argued that it was necessary to broaden the membership in order to make the party politically stronger. In the end, 'Aflag won.

Carrying further this concept of enlightenment, 'Aflag has stated that even those who now oppose the Ba'ath's ideas possess a "hidden will" to Arab nationalism that has not yet been revealed to them. Also, underlying 'Aflag's thinking seems to be a suffering motif. He has stated that "the driving factor in the Arab world is suffering", which he regards as a boon which makes more certain the attainment of ideals. He emphasized the healing power of pain and suffering. 'Aflag stated that the struggle for Arab unity would involve a painful process of structural transformation, referred to in Ba'athist writing as "Inqilab" but the result will be the resurrection (ba'ath) of the Arabs. Only those who are in harmony with the Arab spirit are capable of leading the people. Of course, it is the Ba'athists who constitute this elite. Another radical departure from current Arab nationalist thought has been 'Aflag's ideas on the subject of the "new Arabs". He called on the Arabs to stop blaming imperialism for all of their ills and to regard it as "a result of our own inaction in directing a change in our rotten internal situation and not as a cause for this situation and its persistence".⁶²

⁶²This demonstration is derived from Gordon H. Terry - The Ba'ath Ideology and Practice, pp 450-454.

C. PARTY STRUCTURE

The Ba'ath Party does not accept the legitimacy of existing Arab states but refers to each of the Arab nations as a Region. Each Region is subdivided into district Branches and each Branch into Units. The Units, in turn, are composed of many Cells, which lie at the bottom of the organizational structure. These Cells play an important role in maintaining contact with various sections of society and are responsible for recognizing and recruiting new members for the party. Every Region has a Congress for advisory purposes, an Executive or Regional Command and a Secretary. At the very top of the pyramid of organizational structure lies the General Congress, the national leadership (of the "Arab nation"), and the Secretary General. Local societal issues are resolved within regional headquarters, while matters of party policy are decided by the General Congress. Many of these organizational infrastructures remained, at least in theory, within many Arab countries, since the Ba'athist never succeeded in establishing themselves in the practical politics of those areas.⁶³

⁶³Islamic Revolution, Ba'athist Syria and Iraq: "A Comparative Approach", by S. N. Mehdi, Dec. 1981, p. 7.

IX. THE SYRIAN ARMY: HISTORY AND INTRODUCTION

Since 1945, the Syrian army has been involved in three major wars and innumerable minor skirmishes with Israel, large-scale military interventions in Jordan and Lebanon, military confrontations with its other two neighbors, Turkey and Iraq, and a total of 21 coups against its own government. It has grown to a regular strength of 392,500 men⁶⁴ (500,000 on mobilization), and absorbs almost one fifth of the entire GNP. It disposes of the most modern weapons in such numbers that it surpasses the British and French armies in total weaponry, although those countries have seven times Syria's population and about 50 times its GNP.

This army, which dominates every aspect of Syrian political and economic life, had its origin in the "Troupes Speciales du Levant" (originally called the Syrian Legion) which the French created in their newly acquired Middle Eastern possessions after World War I.

The local forces France then created for internal security purposes, however, were built up with the potential threat of Syrian-Arab nationalism very much in mind, and so the pattern of recruitment avoided Sunni Muslim Arabs of urban background as much as possible. The Sunni Muslim Arabs

⁶⁴The Military Balance 1986-1987, The International Institute for Strategic Studies [Syria], 23 Tavistock Street, London WC2E7NQ, pp 108-109.

of the cities and plains of Central Syria make up about 65% of Syria's population, but there was also a 13% Christian minority, a small Kurdish minority (albeit Sunni), and a variety of heterodox Muslim or ethnic minorities - Circassian, Druze, Isma'ili and Alawite - making up about 20% of the total population. It was from these minorities, and particularly from the Alawites, that the French recruited most of their "Troupes Speciales", on the principle of divide and rule.

There was, indeed, little inclination on the part of Sunni Arabs to join the army, not only because it was an instrument of alien rule, but because aversion to military service was deeply ingrained in the peasant population after centuries of Ottoman conscription methods. Educated Syrian Arabs, enjoying many more attractive alternatives for advancement in commerce, government and the professions, had never shown an inclination towards the profession of military officer. Thus, in 1938, the Troupes Speciales, numbering some 10,000 men and 306 officers (of whom only 88 were French, mainly in the higher ranks) contained a majority of Syrians who were of rural background and minority origins. Those urban Sunnis who did become officers were of the lower-middle classees, not from the Syrian political and economic elite.

It was these troops who became the core of the new Syrian army after independence. After a period of military occupation, French powers were effectively transferred to a Syrian government in January, 1944, and full independence was

achieved in April, 1946. The former Troupes Speciales became the Syrian army, serving the first government to rule an independent and united Syria since the fall of Ummayad Empire in the eighth century. An air force was founded in 1948 and a navy in 1950.

The new Syrian state almost at once became embroiled in the 1948 Palestine War, in which its troops were severely handled by the victorious Israelis. In immediate reaction to this, there were three coups in 1949 led by former officers of the Troupes Speciales of which the last, headed by Colonel Adib Shishakli, succeeded in retaining power until 1954. The successor government survived numerous further coup attempts and took the country into a federal union with Egypt as the United Arab Republic in 1958, but the extreme resentment of Syrian army officers at being forced to play a subordinate role to the more numerous and powerful Egyptians in the new joint army was the main motive force behind yet another coup in 1961 that took Syria out of the union. A further successful coup followed in March, 1962, and a third in March, 1963.

The seemingly endless succession of coups and attempted coups between 1949 and 1963 arose from two principal facts. First, the Arab-Israeli confrontation. The second reason for the coups was the fact that this overwhelmingly dominant army was internally divided into bitterly hostile factions in which generational rivalry played a large part.

Colonel Shishakli, like most Syrian senior officers of the 1950s, was a graduate of the French Military Academy at St. Cyr. Like his colleagues, he had developed strong links with the conservative civilian elite, and the factions which they formed were allied to parallel factions in that elite. Below them in the military hierarchy, however, were younger officers of a more radical disposition, who had attended the military academy at Homs, had been exposed to the radical Arab nationalist ideology expounded by al-Husri, Minister of Education, just after independence, and had been deeply influenced by the example and ideas of Egypt's President Nasser. They generally came from the same ethnic and social background as their predecessors in the Troupes Speciales - from the minority groups, especially Alawites, and from the peasantry and lower-middle classes - but the prevailing intellectual environment and the monopolization of lucrative alliances with the civilian elite by their superiors both drove them in the same direction: anti-colonialism (and consequently, anti-Western sentiments) and socialism.

The first time that radical nationalist officers achieved power was in 1954. No sooner had they done so, than Syria began to come under great pressure to adhere to the Western-dominated Baghdad Pact which was then being constructed in the region as part of the West's Cold War strategy against the Soviet Union. These pressures soon extended to Turkish and Iraqi troop movements along the Syrian border, but the new

regime was strongly opposed to the Baghdad Pact, which it saw as an instrument for renewed Western hegemony in the area and a distraction from the more important problem of Israel. It was at this point in 1955 that the Soviet Union first offered diplomatic support to Syria, and also showed willingness to provide the country with the modern arms which the West had refused to sell it. The relationship which began with the delivery of the Soviet and Czech arms and the arrival of Warsaw Pact military advisers in that year was more cemented firmly by Soviet promises of support for Syria during the Anglo-French-Israeli attack on Egypt in 1956, a renewed attempt by the Baghdad Pact to precipitate the fall of the Syrian regime through the creation of threatening troop concentration along the Turkish border, and the Anglo-American military interventions in Jordan and Lebanon in 1958.⁶⁵

After the emergency of the radical neo-Ba'athist regime in 1966, Soviet military assistance became far more lavish, and it has been indispensable in making possible the expansion of the Syrian army from the 60,000 men and 400 tanks of 1965 to the 500,000 men and 4100 tanks of today. The remarkable stability of this relationship, in comparison to the history of Soviet relations with other Arab countries, derives largely from the fact that the Syrians have never allowed the Soviet Union to gain a disproportionate influence in the

⁶⁵George Lenczowski, pp 335-345, pp 369-373, pp 483-488.

internal affairs of the country or army: they have never permitted the Russians military base facilities, nor have Soviet officers and NCOs ever been placed in positions of command over Syrian troops. Consequently, there has not been the kind of anti-Soviet backlash that occurred in Egypt.

The relatively greater stability of Syria's military government since 1963, which at last permitted a rapid development of the country's economy, was due to the final, inevitable settlement of the generational feud within the officer corps in favor of the younger group in the March, 1963 coup. In contrast to earlier left-wing and radical nationalist regimes, the group who seized power in 1963 had a political doctrine and a party framework which allowed them to survive. The doctrine was that of the Ba'ath Party.

The coup of March, 1963 was a different kind from those that had gone before; therefore, and following an attempted counter coup in July of that year, the Ba'athist officers ruthlessly proceeded to eliminate all further centers of resistance within the army, and began the process of economic, political and sometimes physical liquidation of the traditional civilian elite. At the head of this government was the army commander, Major General Amim al-Hafiz.

After a result of disagreements within the Ba'athist party, a new coup in February, 1966 brought the so-called neo-Ba'athist groups of Dr. Nureddin al-Atasi to power, and gave increased influence to civilian elements within the

party. The succeeding 4 years saw the most extreme and brutal totalitarian regime imposed on Syria, with even the small property-owning and merchant classes being effectively destroyed or driven into exile. The army's officer corps became almost totally politicized, within military competence and attention to duty ceasing to figure at all in the selection of officers for promotion. This had much to do with the Syrian army's disastrous defeat in the June, 1967 war with Israel as a result of which the Golan Heights came under Israeli occupation.

In 1970, Syria intervened in the Jordan Civil War on behalf of the Palestinian guerillas. Numbers of military officers were greatly opposed to this venture, and none more than the Defense Minister, Lieutenant-General Hafez Assad, a senior Ba'athist who also served as a commander of the air force. The government overruled his protests and dispatched a Syrian armored column into northern Jordan, but Assad, as head of the air force, withheld air support; as a consequence, the Syrian force was badly mauled by Jordanian tanks and aircraft, and then forced to withdraw by a combination of Israeli threats and Soviet and American pressure. In November, 1970, the more moderate military wing of the Ba'ath party seized power under the leadership of Assad in the so-called "correctionist movement". Assad was elected president in 1971.

President Assad's regime was initially extremely popular in Syria;, however, because it ended the veritable reign of terror of the previous four years. It continued the drive to construct a strong socialist and centralized state controlled by an army- dominated administration, but there was a great easing of economic and political restrictions and a consequent surge of economic growth. The economic liberalization produced a 159% growth in the GNP between 1970 and 1975.

A. STRENGTH AND BUDGET

The strength of the Syrian armed forces in 1986 was 392,500 regulars and 272,500 reservists, out of a total population of 11,250,000. The army was far the strongest service, with 270,000 regular officers and men and 100,000 first-line reservists for whom a full regular scale of equipment issue was immediately available. The air force numbered 70,000, all of whom were regulars. The navy is the smallest service by far, with only 2500 regulars and 2500 reservists. The Syrian armed forces incorporate a fourth branch, Air-Defense Command, on the Soviet model, with a strength of 60,000 men, but its personnel are drawn from the army and air force and are included within those totals.

Also included within the army totals, but in practice operating under a separate command, are some 15,000* Special Forces troops, and between 5,000* and 10,000* "Detachments for the Defense of the Regime" ("World Armies", 1983 estimates

these "Forces" by 105,000), which serve as a Praetorian Guard. Paramilitary forces included a Gendarmerie of 8,000 men, and a Desert Guard (Hajjana of some 1800 men who are principally employed in controlling the bedouins of the eastern desert.

Syrian defense expenditure in 1986 was \$3,623,000,000 out of a GNP of \$54,000,000,000.⁶⁶

B. COMMAND AND CONSTITUTIONAL STATUS

All executive power is vested in the president who also holds the office of Commander-in-Chief. All senior military appointments, promotions and transfers are made by the president or his immediate entourage, and similarly, all movements of major military units within the country must be approved by him. The president appoints his own cabinet, which is not subject to approval by the elected People's Council.

The Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces is also the Army Chief of Staff. The other three armed forces - air force, air defense, and the small navy, have their own commanders and staffs, subordinate to the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, or in the navy's case, subordinate to the local army commander responsible for the coastal region.

⁶⁶The numbers in this section are derived from: a) The Military Balance, Syria, 1986-1987, pp 108-109. b) the Middle East Military Balance, 1985, "Syria", Edited by Mark A. Heller, The Jerusalem Post, West View Press, Jerusalem 41000, p. 249.

There are at least five major internal security and intelligence services in Syria, some of which fall under the Interior Ministry, while others are answerable to the Chief of Military Intelligence. The coordinating authority, the National Security Council, is headed by a general, who is thus in effect Head of the Secret Police.

Outside of the normal command structure of the army stand the 105,000 strong "Special Forces" ("Military Balance", 1986 estimates these "Forces" by 20,000 to 25,000 only), and the division-strength "Detachments for the Defense of the Regime", commanded by the President's brother, Lieutenant-Colonel Rifat Asad. Figure 1 gives us an idea of how the Power Groups in the Syrian regime, are interlocked and mutually reinforcing each other. The "Special Forces" and the "Detachments for the Defense for the Regime" are recruited almost exclusively from Alawite areas, and are equipped with heavy weapons and tanks. The "Detachments" are permanently kept in Damascus protecting the Presidential Palace; the "Special Forces", equally fanatical in their loyalty to President Assad, have been doing most of Syria's actual fighting in Lebanon since 1976. These two forces would constitute the principal defense of the regime against the rest of the army should a confrontation arise.

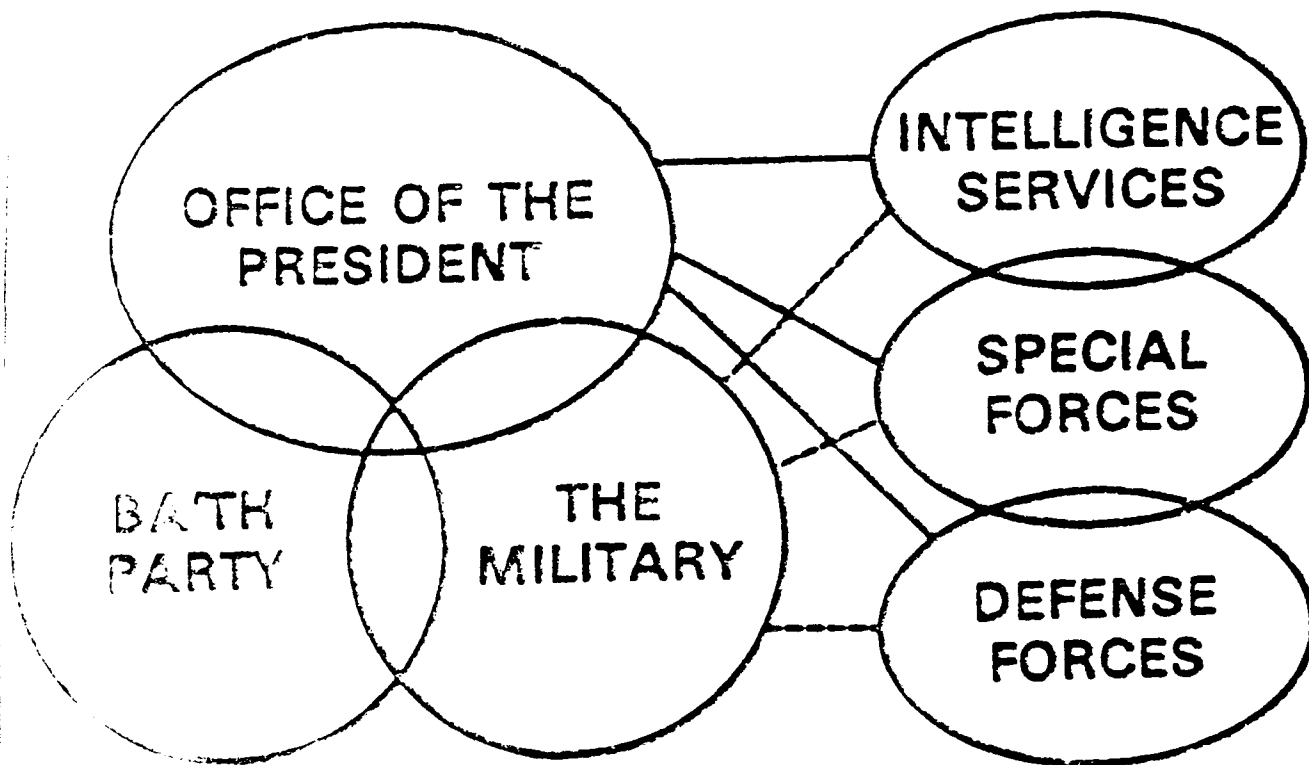


FIGURE 1.

The Syrian Power Establishment: Key Power Groups.
Source: Benedict F. Fitzgerald, The Syrian Army: An Activist Military Force in the Middle East. Carlisle Barracks, PA: Army War College. Strategic Studies Institute April 30, 1982, Fig. 2 p.3.

2. ROLE, COMMITMENT, DEPLOYMENT AND RECENT OPERATIONS

The Syrian army's military role has always been of paramount importance in view of the Arab-Israeli conflict which has been in existence almost from the date of its creation. Its parallel political role has sometimes had deleterious consequences for its primary mission; however, to some extent this was true in the 1948 war, which was ineptly directed by an officer corps in which advancement depended on political

influence more than on professional ability, and it was entirely true of the disastrous 1967 war.

Syria belongs to the Arab Defense Council, a subsidiary body of the Arab League created in 1959, and to the Unified Arab Command, set up in 1964. But the defense agreements which have been of any significance have all been bilateral, e.g., the alliances with which Syria fought the June, 1967 war were the bilateral defense agreements with Egypt of November, 1966 and with Jordan in May, 1967, which provided for the establishment of a Defense Council and Joint Command.

The most important of Syria's external defense relationships was not with an Arab country at all, but with the Soviet Union. The apogee was in 1980 when both countries concluded a friendship treaty.

The Syrian army went to war in October, 1973 enjoying four great advantages over 1967: a vastly expanded and improved armory of weapons, officers who could be relied on to know their job and stay with the troops, the benefit of years of work by a greatly expanded Soviet advisory corps, and the inestimable advantage of surprise. Despite these advantages, the 1973 war was certainly not a military victory for the Syrians. They ended up losing 600 km² of territory in addition to the area they had lost in 1967. In the political circumstances of 1973, however, almost any military outcome short of the Israeli occupation of Damascus

would have meant a political victory for Syria, simply by demonstrating that they were still a military threat which could not be ignored either by Israel or by the Great Powers, and so it proved under the disengagement agreement of May, 1974 the Israelis withdrew from the additional Syrian territory they had captured.

Since 1974, apart from the brief deployment of two divisions along the Iraqi border in August, 1975, all the army's operational experience has been in Lebanon. The deployment of the Syrian army, in consonance with the country's main military preoccupation, is mainly in the southwest, between Damascus and the Golan front, in the Bekaa valley of Lebanon and eastwards from the southern end of the front, in an attempt to protect against Israeli flanking moves. Only light covering forces are maintained along Syria's other frontiers. Most other Syrian troops are located at bases, depots and training camps which are mainly located in and near the larger cities, thus also serving in the function of garrisons.

One third of all the motor vehicles in Syria carry the army's green license plates, and lands, buildings and services have been requisitioned on a very large scale. The armed forces have the ability in practice to disregard the directives of other ministries and to reallocate to themselves resources of material, foreign exchange and industrial capacity which were originally planned for other purposes.

There is also a very substantial sector of Syrian industry which is controlled by the army. Over 200,000 civilians work in army-run enterprises. Taking this together with the effects of conscription and premilitary training in schools, and the omnipresent military intelligence services, there can be scarcely a family in Syria which does not have regular contact with the army in one way or another.

The Syrian army was unwillingly drawn into new hostilities by Israel's invasion of Southern Lebanon on June 6, 1982. It suffered heavy tank losses in its withdrawal to the line of the Beirut-Damascus road, and subsequently, further equipment losses, including the loss of aircrafts, in Israel's attacks on its position in the Bekaa valley, which employed the most modern methods of electronic target acquisition and weapon guidance and homing.

D. ORGANIZATION

1. Arms of Service.

The Syrian army is divided into the conventional arms - infantry, artillery, engineers and services. Air-Defense Command, although it combines army and air force personnel under army command, does not have its own separate branch structure.

2. Operational.

The general staff organization is patterned on that of the French army, with four chiefs of bureaus charged with

responsibility for personnel and administration, intelligence, operations and training, and logistics. There is also a special staff composed of the directors of the various technical functions and services. The military chain of command extends from General Headquarters in Damascus to the component field commanders and chiefs of the combat arms. Air force headquarters is also in Damascus. The navy's headquarters is near Latakia; its commander is subordinate to the local army commander in the area, and a director of naval operations exercises direct control over all units afloat.

The Syrian army is made up of four armored divisions, each with two armored and one mechanized brigade, and two mechanized divisions each having one armored and two mechanized brigades. There are further two independent armored brigades, four independent mechanized brigades and three independent infantry brigades. The army also contains two artillery brigades, five commando regiments, one paratroop regiment, two surface-to-surface missile regiments, one with scud missiles and one with Frog-7s, and 26 SAM batteries with SA-21-31-5 1-6s. They received recently missiles SS-21. The internal organization of all army combat units now closely parallels the Soviet model.

The Air-Defense Command, under army control, is organized into 50 fixed SAM batteries equipped with SA-21-3s, 25 mobile batteries SA-61-8s, anti-aircraft artillery

batteries of a variety of calibers, plus interceptor aircraft and air defense radars provided by the air force.

The air force's tactical organization consists of: 11 fighter-ground attack squadrons (three with MiG-17s, three with SU-7s); three fighter squadrons with MiG-23s and MiG-27s; 12 interceptor squadrons with MiG-21 PF/MF (under the operational control of Air Defense Command); and transport, helicopter and training squadrons; a reconnaissance squadron of MiG-25s. Major Syrian air bases are at Damascus, Hamah, Dumayr, Palmyra, Sahles, Sahra, Aleppo, Blay, Sayqat, Rasafa, Khalkhalah and Masiriyah.

The navy does not appear to have any permanent operational subdivisions; all units at sea are directly controlled by the Director of Naval Operations. The major naval bases are at Latakia and Baniyas.

E. EQUIPMENT AND ARMS INDUSTRY

The Syrian army's armored strength consists of 1000 T-62, 2200 T-54-55 and 790 T-72 medium tanks. The army has unknown numbers of BRDM reconnaissance vehicles and BMP MICVs. The mechanized infantry is borne in 1600 BTR-40-50-60-152 and OT-64 APCs. Artillery strength consists of some 800 122 mm, 130 mm, 152 mm and 180 mm guns/howitzers, 2600 SU-100 and some ISU-122-152 SP guns. These are supplemented by 122 mm, 140 mm and 240 mm multiple rocket launchers, and 82 mm, 120 mm and 160 mm mortars. For long-range bombardment of targets

within Israel, the army has 30 FROG-7 and 36 scud surface-to-surface missiles. The army has 1000 Milan missiles from France. These missiles are supported by 57 mm, 85 mm and 100 mm towed, ZSU-23-4 and ZSU-57-2 self-propelled anti-aircraft guns, and SA-71-9 surface-to-air missiles. There are further SA-61-81-9 SAMs on order. The army has 40 Gazelle helicopters.

Area air defense, as opposed to mobile point-defense AA weapons with the combat units, is the responsibility of Air-Defense Command. This controls 150 batteries of SA-21-3 and 125 batteries of SA-6 missiles, AA guns, 12 squadrons of interceptor aircraft and a comprehensive air-defense radar network which, since 1973, has been extended to cover all the country's industrial areas.

The great majority of Syrian weapons is derived from the Soviet Union, and must almost certainly continue to be so, both because of the logistical problems that would arise if major items of military equipment from other countries had to be fitted into the structure, and more importantly because the Soviet Union is the only country willing to provide Syria with arms in the quantities and of the level of sophistication the country requires. Moreover, no other arms supplier has the sheer reserve industrial capacity to provide Syria rapidly with replacements for weapons losses of the scale that were experienced in 1973. Thus, although Syria has deliberately diversified its arms-purchasing policy since 1973 by acquiring specific items of Western military equipment which were

superior to their Soviet equivalents - Milan anti-tank guided weapons, and Gazelle and Super Ferlon helicopters from France, HOT ATGWs from the USA, AB-212 helicopters from Italy, all-terrain trucks from Germany, and ordnance production equipment from Austria, there is no alternative to the Soviet Union for most of its equipment needs.

There have, of course, been difficulties with Soviet arms supplies as well, on both political and financial grounds. The Soviet Union has used its virtual monopoly position from time to time in an attempt to influence Syrian policy by slowing down the delivery of weapons and spares - in early 1974, for example when it was trying to persuade Syria to attend the Geneva Conference on Middle East peace, and in 1976 during the Syrian military operations against the Palestinians in Lebanon. It also insisted on cash payment for its weapons nowadays, which posed a considerable problem for Syria in 1976-7 when the flow of financial assistance for military purposes from the Arab oil states had temporarily slowed down.

F. RECRUITMENT, TRAINING AND RESERVES

Candidates who wish to become regular officers must be between 18 and 23 years of age, and in possession of a satisfactory school matriculation certificate. Selections for the military academies are made from among those who pass the entrance examination and are physically fit.

Army officers undergo a two-year course of instruction at the Military Academy at Homs, which was founded in 1933 by the French. It is primarily a school for training infantry officers; graduates selected for other arms or services go on to additional specialized training at other army schools, or are sent abroad for instruction at foreign schools and academies. Since 1963, almost all foreign training has been done in Soviet and Eastern European institutions. Upon completion of the two-year course at the Academy, graduates are commissioned as second-lieutenants.

The Air Force Academy, founded in 1960, is at Nayrab air base near Aleppo. It provides officer candidates with a two-year course of instruction in theoretical, technical and scientific subjects, and basic flight training. The Naval Academy, founded in 1962, is at Latakia, and also provides a two-year course of theoretical and practical instruction.

Most of the manpower of the armed forces is provided, at least in the first instance, by conscription, which was introduced by the Service of the Flag Law in 1953. All Syrian males, with a few exceptions, are liable to perform 30 months of military service (subject to extension at the discretion of the army) commencing at age 19 years, and subsequently, to serve in the active reserve for 18 years. Some individuals with special qualifications of use to the State have to serve only 18 months, and deferments are available for students going onto university. The conscript classes, designated by

their year of birth, are called up in two annual increments in March and September. Some conscripts, mostly college graduates, are selected for training as reserve officers, while most of those with school-leaving certificates become reserve NCOs (though not with the same authority as professional NCOs) after basic training. The remainder of the conscripts serve as privates.

Military training for many Syrian conscripts begin long before induction, in the 'Futuwah' program for secondary school pupils. Begun in 1956 with regular army instructors, it is now run by full-time civilian instructors who are usually reserve NCOs or officers. All male secondary school and university students attend compulsory weekly sessions of military training, and in the case of secondary school pupils, compulsory annual summer training as well. The school-leaving examination includes military sciences and practical military examinations upon which pass or failure are contingent.

Once in the army, conscripts undergo basic training and then go on to their units where they receive further on-the-job training, most of which is conducted by NCOs. The units of the army operate the usual annual cycle of field training exercises. Conscripts selected for reserve officer training attend a concentrated nine month course at the Reserve Officers' school in Aleppo, and are then assigned to a unit, usually in the infantry, as an officer candidate. Those whose performance has been satisfactory are granted

commissions as reserve second-lieutenants one month before the end of their required two-year tour of duty.

Medical officers are given direct commissions after short periods of military training: six months at the Military Academy for those going into the regular service and three months at the Reserve Officer's Academy for those fulfilling their national service obligations.

The professional NCO Corps is drawn from conscripts who choose to enlist for an initial five-year period in the regular army on completion of their obligatory service. Full status as a professional rather than a conscript NCO is not granted, however, until the end of the first term of voluntary enlistment. Those volunteers who fail to make NCO may re-enlist up to a maximum total time of 15 years in the service; professional NCOs are retired at 45, or at their own request after 20 years of service. There is a wide variety of opportunities for NCOs to receive specialized technical instruction and advanced schooling, both within their own branches and at advanced career technical schools which all three services maintain for senior NCOs. Engineers and other highly trained and technical personnel are also recruited directly by the army as NCOs by the inducements of high salaries and other privileges; this applies particularly to those who work in the army's research centers and maintenance workshops.

The general standard of individual training of the Syrian army in the late 1970s was good, and it was by then largely

independent of Soviet training assistance except for specific highly advanced technical subjects. The estimated number of Soviet advisors with the Syrian armed forces in 1978 was 1800, down from 3500 a few years earlier (some sources estimate the number by 5000 now), and the majority of those were assisting in the training of the air force and Air Defense Command (where the Russians insist on placing one adviser with each SAM unit). The professional NCOs continued to be the backbone of the system, but officer recruitment, though still drawing disproportionately heavily on the minorities, was based on professional competence or promise rather than on the purely political grounds of the 1960s.

In general, quarters, food and pay in the Syrian army compare favorably with what the average serviceman could expect to receive in the civilian economy. Officers and NCOs have separate accommodation, including family housing for married regulars on most posts. Medical care is of high standard, leave is 30 days a year for regulars and 15 days a year for conscripts, and there are a wide variety of supplements to basic pay for dependents, duty in a combat zone, subsistence and specialist qualifications which in many cases double the basic rate. Officers receive an allowance for servants (I personally doubt this last sentence). Retirement pay is adequate to live on, with NCOs qualifying for retirement after 20 years and officers after 25 years.

The reserves are almost all army, there being only 2500 naval reservists. The widely used figure of 100,000 army reservists represents an estimate of how many reservists the army could actually equip and fit into its formations upon mobilization; the actual total of former conscripts with a continuing reserve liability is many times that figure. In practice, the army would only bring back those who had completed their service within the previous three-five years, with the possible exception of reserve officers, as older men would be unfamiliar with much of the army's equipment. The mobilization organization for the reserves is maintained at a high level of readiness, and although not so quick-moving as that of the Israelis, could produce most of those reservists who are actually required at three-four days'notice.

G. RANK, DRESS AND DISTINCTIONS

The military rank and grade structure is the same for all services and conforms to normal practices. In general, lieutenants command platoons and captains are in charge of companies; squad leaders are usually sergeants with corporals as assistants.

Officer's rank is shown on shoulder boards, NCOs rank by chevrons of silver thread worn point upward on the upper sleeve; the background color of the shoulder board or chevron indicates the branch of service.

Fariq (Lieutenant-general) - Crossed swords and two eagles.
Liwa (Major-general) - Crossed swords and one eagle.
Zaim (Brigadier-general) - Eagle and three stars.
'Aqid (Colonel) - Eagle and two stars.
Muqaddam (Lieutenant-colonel) - Eagle and one star.
Rais Awwal (Major) - Eagle.
Rais (Captain) - Three stars.
Mulazim Awwal (First-lieutenant) - Two stars.
Mulazim (Second-lieutenant) - One star.

Wakil Awwal (Chief warrant officer) - Three chevrons over two stars.
Wakil (Warrant officer) - Three chevrons over one star.
Raqib Awwal (First sergeant) - Three chevrons.
Raqib (Sergeant) - Two chevrons.
'Arif (Corporal) - Two inverted chevrons (point down).
Jundi Awwal (Private first class) - One inverted chevron.
Jundi (Private)

Different sources give slightly different explanations of the ranks in the Syrian army. I added here a table of the Syrian military ranks and insignia and United States equivalents from another source. Please see Figure 2 for more information and clarification.

Army combat clothing is of Soviet pattern. Officers' service uniform is wool coat and trousers of British design, with a visored cap; enlisted men wear battledress with a garrison cap. The red and white chequered Arab headdress (the Kaffiyah) is sometimes worn by soldiers guarding important national buildings. The dress uniform, worn by officers only, is of dark blue with a gold-decorated upstanding collar, black shoes and gold-trimmed belt. Air force personnel wear the same uniforms as the army, and naval uniforms are similar to those of the British or American navies.

Figure 2. Military Ranks and Insignia and United States Equivalents

Taken from Syria: A Country Study, p. 214.

Richard F. Nyrop, Syria: A Country Study, The American University, Washington, D.C., Third Edition, First printing, 1979.

Decorations carry considerable prestige, and are distributed sparingly. In order of precedence, the decorations for valor or outstanding performance in war service are: the Medal of Military Honor (four classes), the Medal of Merit (five classes), the Loyalty Medal (five classes) and the War Medal (four classes). They may be awarded to either military or civilian personnel. Any participant in hostile action against Israel is awarded the Palestine Medal, and those who receive wounds in combat receive the War Wounded Medal.⁶⁷

There is a general consensus among the political observers that Syria under the leadership of President Hafez al-Assad is working seriously towards achieving a grandiose dream of restoring its powerful, always proud empire - Greater Syria. The Greater Syria State which the Syrians dream of is the state which was planned and advocated by Antun Sa'adeh and his followers - the Syrian Social National Party, SSNP. According to Sa'adeh, this state includes present Syria, Jordan, Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq, Alexandretta and Cyprus. To achieve this great dream, the Syrian policy makers adopted different pragmatic policies vis-a-vis the aforementioned countries in addition to the two great superpowers and Iran. Given the ambiguity of the Syrian policy makers and the

⁶⁷This section - The Syrian army - is quoted from Gwynne Dyer, "Syria", in World Armies, edited by John Keegan, Gale Research Company, Booktower, Detroit, Michigan 48226, 1983, pp 561-571.

impenetrability of their decision-making black box, the analyses of the Syrian foreign policy would be based on sources of Middle Eastern famous analysts and the modest experience of the writer.

X. SYRIA AND ISRAEL

A. 1948-1967: THE PERIOD BETWEEN THE WARS

Like the rest of the Arab World, Syria has never accepted the existence of Israel and has consistently labored to destroy it. Syrians generally regarded the area of Palestine as "Southern Syria" and often referred to it in this way.

In reaction to the U.N. resolution of 1947, to partition Palestine into two states, one Arab, one Jewish, Syria joined the other Arab states in condemning the U.N. resolution and in preparations to nullify it by military force.

The State of Israel was proclaimed on May 14, 1948. During that night, the army of the newly created state of Syria was one of the seven Arab armies that invaded the new state of Israel. In fact, when the war ended in January, 1949, Egypt, Lebanon and to an extent Jordan, lost that war while the Syrian army still held a small but strategically significant series of salients on the Israeli side of the international border. As a result, while Egypt and Lebanon, anxious to retrieve their lost territories, had a powerful incentive to enter the Rhodes Armistice negotiations, Syria was reluctant to do so.

On August 23, 1949, Syria and Israel reached an agreement by the help of U.N. mediator Ralph Bunch. According to the agreement, Syrian forces would be evacuated but the areas held by them at the cessation of hostilities would remain

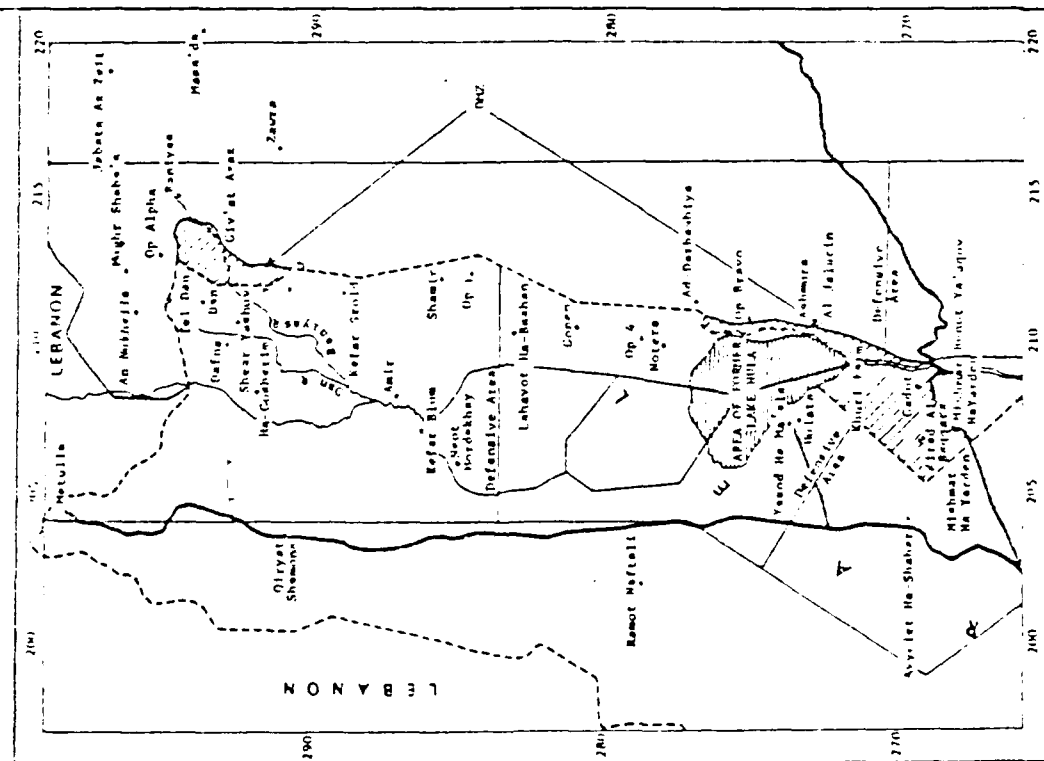
demilitarized. Since the sovereign rights over these areas (see map on page 102) were not determined and since neither side would give up hope ultimately to establish full sovereignty in the demilitarized zones (DMZs), the latter became a festering wound, a constant source of contention, during the following years. Israel hoped to contain the growing friction by gradually moving towards a de Facto partition of the DMZs. Syria would have the southern DMZ and Israel the other two zones. Syria, however, was unwilling to endorse such a solution.

During the short rule of General Husni Zaim, Syria proposed peace talks with the new Jewish State in 1949 following the armistice negotiations. Syria offered attractive concessions to Israel. Syria offered to relinquish all the DMZs in exchange for holding peace talks with Israel. The Israelis, encouraged and supported by the West, rejected the Syrian proposal which was a great opportunity of many missed opportunities that would have improved the climate not only of Syrian-Israel relations but of U.S.-Syrian relations too.⁶⁸

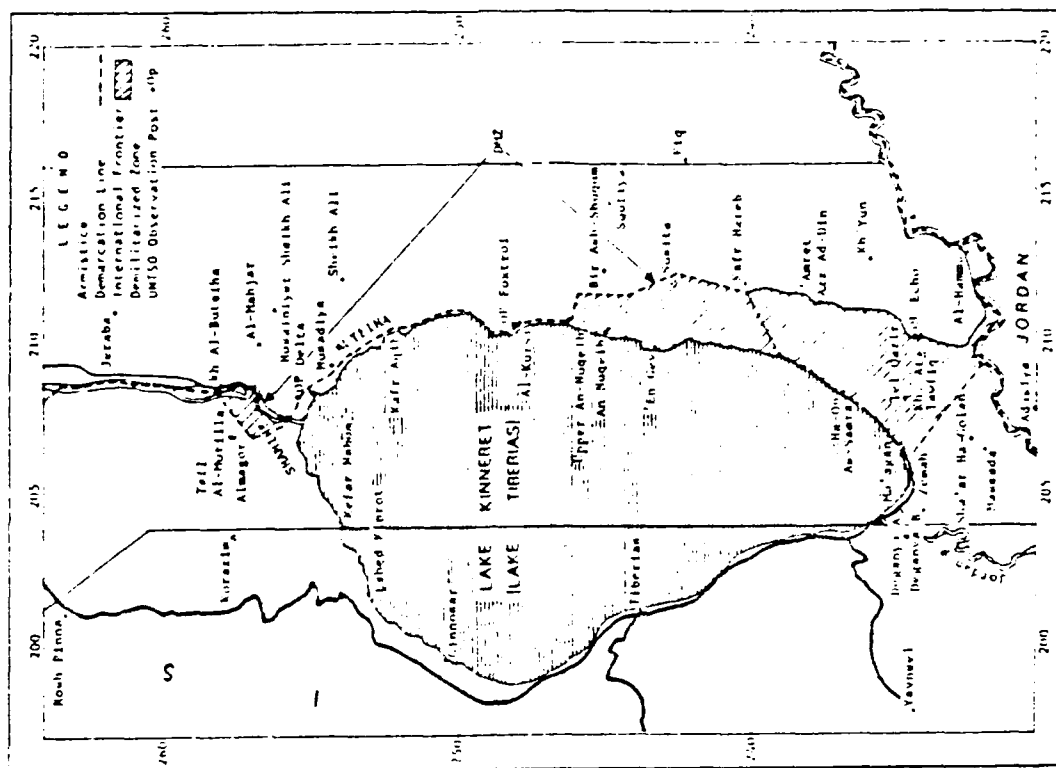
From 1949-1953, Israelis attempted to persuade the Syrians to accept the idea of de Facto partition. Their efforts were, however, to no avail. Hence, Israel decided to act unilaterally. Paramilitary kibbutzim were established in several

⁶⁸Talcott W. Seely, "U.S.-Arab Relations: The Syrian Dimension, 1985, p. 3.

The South of the Militarized Zone



The South of the Militarized Zone



Taken from Syria and Israel: The Politics of Escalation pp 158-159.

Figure 3. Avner Yaniv, "Syria and Israel: The Politics of Escalation" in Syria under Assad, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1986.

parts of the DMZ and Israeli earth-moving equipment moved to the Hula Lake and swamp area, in order to reclaim it. At first Syria reacted calmly and merely complained to the Mixed Armistice Commission (MAC). But as of February, 1951, Syria decided to resort to force in order to thwart the Israeli activities. The upshot was escalation sometimes leading to pitched battle involving large ground forces and even air power.

During 1951-5, however, the focus gradually shifted to the Sea of Galilee, where Syria demanded fishing rights. Israel rejected the Syrian demand. Syria reacted by force and sought to prevent Israeli vessels from moving in the northeast corner of the lake. Again, the result was escalation which climaxed on December 11, 1955 in an Israeli raid on Syrian forces in which 50 Syrian soldiers lost their lives. During the period of 1955-60, small scale incidents continued and intensified. In 1960, Israel started to cultivate parts of the southern DMZ. Syria, as usual, tried to thwart Israel militarily but the Israelis reacted by the Tawfig raid of February, 1960 and Nugeib raid of mid-March, 1962. Meanwhile, the pending completion of the Israeli National Carrier irrigation project, which was resumed after the collapse of the Johnston plan, had prompted the Arab League to take further action. In August, 1961, the Arab Defense Council approved an Arab League plan for diverting the sources of the Jordan River in order to thwart Israel's National Carrier project.

The Arab defense ministers agreed to establish a joint Arab Command for the purpose of military operations to support the diversion scheme. The fact that these military designs led to naught was mainly due to Nasser's procrastination as he did not want to be dragged into a premature war with Israel. In a summit conference in Cairo on January 13-16, 1964, Nasser agreed, however, to the diversion plan and Syria started the diversion work as it was planned.

As soon as the Syrian diversion work began, Israel was faced by a grave threat to the Jewish State's very life line. The choice was, therefore, between massive punishment with a view to dissuading Syria in one major blow or, alternatively, limited and specific operations which would simply stop the Syrians from carrying on their project. Israel, under the leadership of Levi Eshkol, opted for the limited disruptive alternative.

In February, 1966, power in Syria was seized by the most military wing of the Ba'ath Party under the leadership of Salah J'did and Hafez Assad. The new Syrian leadership took a decision to embark upon a strategy which would mirror image Israel's own strategy. Instead of merely reacting to Israeli action or attempting to stop one or another Israeli project, Syria would, henceforth, initiate military action on a large scale, including an extensive use of air power. The purpose of such a strategy would be either to score a victory against Israel or to accelerate the deterioration in Israeli-Arab

relations and ultimately bring about a large-scale war in which the rest of the Arab World would have to participate. By August 15, 1966, the new strategy was carried into effect. The Syrian air force launched two air strikes on Israeli boats in the Sea of Galilee. The incident ended with one Syrian Mig 17 shot down by Israeli ground fire and one Mig shot down by an Israeli Mirage. Nevertheless, an official communique on Radio Damascus stated the same day that Syria would not confine herself to defensive action, but would attack defined targets and bases of aggression within the occupied area (alias Israel).

On April 7, 1967, the Syrians engaged in a great air battle against Israel in which Syria lost 6 Migs. Having already employed the most formidable weapons in her arsenal, Syria could only engage the Israeli air force on a larger scale, launch a combined operation which was bound to lead to an even more formidable Israeli response, or call on Egypt to make a move which would pose a restraining threat vis-a-vis Israel. Syria selected the second choice. Nasser was in no position to deny Syria a helping hand without a serious loss to his waning prestige. If Nasser were to turn down the Syrian request for help, Syria would have an excellent excuse for de-escalation on the Israel front on the grounds that Syria alone was not a match for Israel. If Nasser were to rise to the challenge, Syria's plight vis-a-vis Israel would be ameliorated too. Thus, calling on Nasser for help must

have appeared to the Syrians as a "heads I win, tails I win" solution.

B. THE SIX DAY WAR AND ITS AFTERMATH

In the event Nasser overplayed his hand, the upshot was that Israeli attention switched entirely to the Egyptian front. At this juncture, the Israeli predisposition was to avoid a two- not to speak of a three-front war. Hence, Israel pre-empted against Egypt on June 5, 1967 without any intention to take on either Jordan or Syria. The latter, however, was impaled on the horns of a difficult dilemma. Having dragged Egypt into war, should Syria come to Egypt's rescue? The Syrians were informed by the Soviets on the first day of the war of the full scope of Egypt's disastrous defeat. Hence, while joining the conflict made no sense, Syria could not afford the risk of being blamed by Egypt, Jordan and the others for causing the war, but shrinking from actively participating in it. The Syrians decided to put in merely a token military effort.

Haunted by the possibility of a confrontation with the Soviets, Israel's Defense Minister, Moshe Dayan, during the Six Day War, offered precisely this argument in order to convince his colleagues that Syria should not be attacked. But Dayan was overruled by a powerful combination of forces which were determined not to let this golden opportunity to get even with Syria slip by. Israel attacked Syria and

succeeded in the conquest of the strategic area of the Golan Heights in the last two days of the Six Day War.

Within the Israeli perception, a conventional deterrence based on a combination of proven military prowess with what was termed 'defensible borders' the occupation of the Golan was an inestimable gain. The other side of the same coin was, however, that Syrian dependence on the Soviets (a critical dimension of escalation in itself), and Syrian commitment to another war which would retrieve the lost territories would grow too. Syria cooperated with Egypt and launched the 1973 war. This war was completely different from the last two. If in 1948, Syria's participation in the war was limited and if in 1967 Syria could drag Egypt into war but then refrain from actually applying any serious pressure on Israel, in 1973, Syria could not help but do her very utmost to assist Egypt in the war. For if Egypt were to attempt the crossing of the canal without Syria when Syrian sovereign territory was held by the common enemy, the Syrian regime would at once miss an opportunity to retrieve Syrian lands and help along a holy Arab cause more generally and Syrian inaction in 1973 war would be virtually inexcusable.

According to political and military analyses, the 1973 war was not an act of escalation by Syria but rather an outgrowth of the Israeli decision to occupy the Golan during 1967 war. At the same time, the actual fighting in the 1973 war entailed a number of escalatory elements. For one thing, Syria launched

SCUD missiles into Israel's rear - a critical element of escalation in both vertical (weapons systems) and horizontal (geographic) terms as well as in terms of a new emphasis on counter-city targeting. In order to deter Syria and others from further resort to such a practice, Israel responded by deep-penetration bombing of Syrian targets which escalated the conflict in these same terms. The sheer size of the military effort on both sides in qualitative and quantitative terms had brought the confrontation to a new level of mutual peril. The superpower involvement politically and in the form of unprecedentedly large airlifts was also a critical element of escalation. In short, in the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War, the calculus of both Israel and Syria had been altered beyond recognition.

The 1973 War ended with a virtual Egyptian betrayal from the Syrian point of view. For whereas Syria was pushing for a new offensive against an exhausted Israel, Egypt was, in fact, seeking a way out of the conflict altogether. Syria was, therefore, put in a position in which she had to take into account the possibility of facing a grimly-determined Israel, whose arsenal was rapidly expanding to a colossal size, without Egypt, and quite possibly without Jordan.

Against this background, the Syrian decision to follow Egypt in accepting a ceasefire, signing a disengagement agreement and proceeding to accept an interim agreement was double-edged. On the one hand, it gave Syria a respite in

which to reorganize for a solitary confrontation with Israel. On the other hand, it could serve as a basis from a gradual search for a rapprochement sometime in the future. Unfortunately, no signs of rapprochement loomed in the horizon; on the contrary, the escalation was stimulated once again as a result of the deterioration in Lebanon and the Israeli-determined policy to annex East Jerusalem and the Golan heights and increasing the Jewish settlements in the occupied territories.

C. THE EFFECTS OF THE LEBANESE CONFLICT

One of the most important instruments of Israel's deterrence strategy all along was the enunciation of Casibelli. Among these, the preservation of the status quo in Lebanon, Jordan and, indeed, Syria itself always loomed very large. If either Iraq or Syria attempted a direct or even an indirect take-over of Jordan, Israel threatened to intervene. If either Iraq or Jordan (and both had such designs in the early part of the 1950s) were to attempt a direct or even indirect take-over of Syria, Israel, again, threatened to intervene. Finally, if Syria - or any other power for that matter - were to attempt a direct or indirect take-over of Lebanon, Israel, once again, would intervene.

Paradoxically, this Israeli policy coincided with a maxim of the Arab League that as long as an all-Arab union remained a distant dream, the territorial integrity of member states

have to be strictly observed. When this maxim was not observed - as in the course of the upheavals in Lebanon and in Jordan during the summer of 1958 and the autumn of 1970, respectively, Israel - in tacit agreement with the U.S. and Britain in 1958 and the U.S. in 1970 - signalled clearly that she would intervene and the status quo was preserved.

The 1975-6 Civil War in Lebanon, however, caused an Israeli reassessment. In the autumn 1975, the Phalanges attempted to expand the domain under their control. The PLO which had hitherto abstained from direct involvement in the conflict was faced by a distinct possibility of a Christian victory, which would be followed sooner or later by a Christian onslaught against the PLO. The latter's decision to throw its weight behind the beleaguered Lebanese "left" immediately tipped the balance against the Christians. Thus, by December, 1975-January, 1976, it already appeared that the PLO and the left might ultimately emerge as Lebanon's rulers.

At this point, both Syria and Israel were faced by a difficult choice. A PLO-Lebanese left victory could result in the appearance of an assertive Lebanon which might seek alliances with Iraq, Egypt, Lybia or all together, in order to offset the weight of both Syria and Israel and thus preserve Lebanon's own independence. Syria could not tolerate such an outcome lest it might spill over into Syria's own internal political scene and reduce her inter-Arab stature. Israel could not tolerate it for fear of an intensified instability

along the Israeli-Lebanese border. Both countries, therefore, moved in a manner which would check the advance of the PLO-Lebanese left coalition. Syria at first attempted mediation between the camps in Lebanon. Having failed, she gradually interfered by force - at first through proxies such as Saika, the Palestine Liberation Army (PLA) Yarmuk Brigade and Gibril's Popular Front/General Command - and subsequently through means of direct intervention of the Syrian army on the side of the beleaguered Phalanges. Israel paralleled Syria's action by building up supportive elements in Southern Lebanon.

Paradoxically, the caution of both Israel and Syria vis-a-vis the Lebanon war was largely due to their fear of collision between themselves. Both countries supported the same party in the Lebanese imbroglio, namely the Phalanges. But the incompatibility of their other interests was such that the risk of collision between them seemed very great.

At this junction the U.S. offered the good offices of L. Dean Brown as a means of helping along the stabilization of Lebanon through a mutually agreed Israeli-Syrian intervention. Syria concurred with the Israeli request that her forces would not move roughly south of the Zahrani River and west of the Bekaa valley and that she would not deploy SAM missiles on Lebanon's territory. Israel, in turn, refrained from direct intervention. The PLO-Lebanese coalition was ruthlessly restrained and the Phalanges were saved.

Apart from the fact that Israel compromised her long-held objection to direct Syrian interference in Lebanon, these new arrangements contained the seeds of a future confrontation, which would not only shatter the precarious and limited Syrian-Israeli accord but would also lead to yet another step up the ladder of escalation between the two countries. One of the results of the tacit 1976 accord was the creation of a vacuum in Southern Lebanon between the Israeli border and the "red" line beyond which the Syrians agreed not to move. Within a short while, this virtual no-man's land was filled by the PLO which sought refuge there from the tightening Syrian embrace in the rest of Lebanon. As the PLO for its own reasons could not afford to hold such an autonomous domain right on Israel's border without using it as a launching pad for further attacks against Israel, both Syria and Israel were soon confronted by a new set of problems. From the Israeli point of view, the problem boiled down to the following: how to restrain the PLO without provoking the Syrians into a new confrontation at a time in which the Arafat trail - the most critical lifeline of the PLO - ran through Syrian lines. From the Syrian point of view, the problem was the obverse: how to pay its dues to the sacrosanct goal of the Palestinians which Syria had so vociferously espoused all along without inviting Israeli counteraction against Syrian forces in Lebanon which could easily escalate "horizontally" to the Golan.

Israel could not curb the activities of the PLO in Lebanon without effectively isolating the PLO from Syria. The latter could perhaps observe the ground rules with Israel but seemed reluctant actively to operate against the PLO. Hence, a new twist to the Israeli-Syrian escalation process became virtually inevitable as a direct result of the intensification of hostilities between the PLO and Israel between 1976 and 1982. In July 1977 Syria abandoned the Phalanges and resumed her support of the PLO. In March, 1978, Israel launched Operation Litani against the PLO. Thereafter, the PLO was forced to abandon guerilla operations and rely instead on long-range artillery and multiple rocket launchers which could cause damage inside Israel while flying over the heads of the UNIFIL and Haddad forces which were supposed to maintain a buffer between Israel and the PLO. By July, 1981, this exchange reached a deadly climax in a three-week war of attrition. The damage to the Israeli population in the area was so extensive that Begin's government accepted a ceasefire with the PLO. But, simultaneously, Begin, Minister of Defense Sharon and a number of other members of the cabinet also decided to launch a major operation against the PLO which would drive the latter out of Lebanon altogether. Operation SHELEG (Hebrew acronym for Peace for the Galilee) in July, 1982, was the result.

Theoretically, operation SHELEG did not have to lead to fresh hostilities between Israel and Syria. After all, the declared purpose was to deal with the PLO and not with Syria.

In practice, however, a new confrontation with Syria was in Israeli perception - inescapable. For one thing, Syria was - with some justice - perceived as the main force behind the stepping up of the PLO's campaign against Israel. Second, faced by the provocation of the Phalanges and by Israel decision to back the latter, Syria abrogated her commitment under the tacit agreement which L. Dean Brown negotiated in 1976 not to deploy SAMs inside Lebanon. The upshot was that the freedom to fly over Lebanese territory which the IAF had enjoyed was gradually diminished. Soon, Israel could argue, the Syrians would gain complete control over the air space of Northern Lebanon and Israel's ability to deal with PLO bases there and to protect the Phalanges would have been completely eroded. All this took place against the background of the most acrimonious election campaign in Israeli history. And in the head of the campaign, Begin was several times carried away emotionally to such an extent that he issued bellicose statements against Syria. In turn, he would have to make good his word or lose credibility both with his domestic constituency and, worse still, with Syria.

As soon as the invasion of Lebanon was underway, Begin called upon President Assad "who has always kept his agreements" not to fight. On the whole, the Syrians complied. But apart from the fact that they did allow the PLO to fire a few artillery rounds from behind their lines, the Syrians also poured massive reinforcements into the Bekaa valley.

Using this as a pretext, the IDF attacked them on the fourth day of the war. The Israeli Air Force (IAF) was ordered to knock out the Syrian SAMs in the northern sector of the Bekaa valley. The IDF ground forces simultaneously moved into the Shouf and drove the Syrian forces in the southern sector of the Bekaa valley to the northern shores of the Qar'awn Lake. Finally, the IDF successfully drove a wedge between the Syrian forces on the high ground around the Beirut-Damascus road and the Syrian contingent in Beirut.

Syria suffered a defeat - especially in the air war. As a result of this war, her capital became exposed to Israeli artillery. The upshot was, inevitably, a frantic Syrian drive to rearm. The Soviets responded by supplying Syria with SAM-5 missiles, SS-21 missiles, MiG 29, large quantities of T-72 tanks, helicopters and other items. The Soviets also had to commit their personnel or, which probably seemed worse, let the Syrians handle the SAM5 system.⁶⁹

Since the 1973 war when Syrian armored units came close to breaking through on the Golan Heights, President Assad has been a stubborn thorn in the Israeli side.⁷⁰ At the present time, Syria is considered the main strategic threat to Israel

⁶⁹This section is quoted from Avner Yaniv, "Syria and Israel: the Politics of Escalation" in Syria under Assad, edited by Moshe Maoz and Avner Yaniv, St. Martin's Press, New York 1986, pp 157-175.

⁷⁰The Financial Times Limited, "Syrian Thorn in Israel's Side," President Assad, by Roger Mathews, January 4, 1986, p. 6.

in the Middle East. Following the visit by Egypt's President Anwar al-Sadat to Jerusalem in 1977, Syria adopted a policy of "strategic balance" which has increased from six to nine divisions and sophisticated Soviet and Western weapons have been acquired. Syria regards its military performance against Israel during Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982 as encouraging.⁷¹ Assad has promised the Syrian people that the Golan Heights would one day be the "heart of Syria" and not its frontier.⁷² Concluded Middle East expert William Quandt of the Brookings Institution: "Both Israel and Syria have got it in their minds that they will fight another major war, and both are very seriously planning for that day."⁷³

A process of escalation which began 40 years earlier with small and strictly localized skirmishes involving far more diplomacy than actual fire and not involving the superpowers had thus expanded dramatically. Geographically, it could lead to war on a long front from Central Lebanon all the way to Southern Golan. Functionally, it could lead to conventional violence. Indeed, handled with less than utmost care,

⁷¹IDF Journal vol. 3, issue 1, Fall 1985, pp 73-76, Language: English, Section Headings: Syria: The Strategic Threat.

⁷²The Washington Post, "Syrian-Israeli Chill Envelops Saturday, Final Edition, First Section; A13.

this confrontation could even involve both the U.S. and the USSR, complete with their awesome nuclear arsenals.

⁷³Time, Section: World; Middle East, "Stirring Up Rumors of War, Jerusalem and Damascus Square Off," by William E. Smith, U.S. Edition, May 26, 1986, p. 30.

XI. SYRIA AND LEBANON

It was mentioned earlier in this paper that present Lebanon was part of a powerful, always proud empire - Greater Syria. At the end of World War I, the land of Greater Syria came under the mandate of Britain and France. France's share of Greater Syria was present Syria, Lebanon and Alexandretta. To weaken the Arab nationalist movement, the French carved contemporary Lebanon from Syria after World War I directly and gave Alexandretta to Turkey a few years later.

The Syrians have never absolved the French for taking territory from them. After World War II, France reluctantly departed, and Syria and Lebanon became independent republics.

Underlying the Syrian state's attitude to Lebanon was the view that the whole of Lebanon and, even more so, the territories added to it by the French in 1920 were part of Syria. The explicit Syrian demands to reintegrate Lebanon or parts of it faded during the years because Syria's domestic weakness, instability and lack of external resources had prevented its leaders from translating their interests and ambitions into actual influence. But an implicit claim was maintained through the Syrian refusal to establish normal diplomatic relations with Lebanon.⁷⁴

⁷⁴Itamar Rabinovich, *The Changing Prism: Syrian Policy in Lebanon as a Mirror, an Issue and an Instrument*, in *Syria under Assad*, edited by Moshe Maoz and Avner Yaniv, St. Martin's Press, N.Y., 1986, p. 180.

Relations between Syria and Lebanon, since independence in 1946, have been characterized by continuing tension over (1) economic matters, (2) asylum granted to political refugees, (3) differing positions on relations with the U.S. and the West, and (4) the conflict with Israel, including the role of the Palestinians in this conflict.

Lebanese and Syrian economies are basically competitive and not complementary, and the two countries have radically different approaches to economic policies. Syria has adopted "economic nationalism", or socialism, as the basis for its economy and Lebanon's policy is based on laissez faire, or free trade. During the Mandate period, the two countries had a unified policy, including a common currency and customs administration. The matter of customs fees produced friction since they were split proportionately, by size, with 44% going to Lebanon and 56% to Syria, while Lebanon produced the greater amount of trade revenue. This unified policy was dissolved in 1950, which precipitated tension requiring Arab league mediation. After two years of negotiations, an economic agreement was signed between the two countries in 1952. The agreement has, on occasion, been used as a weapon against Lebanon by Syria, which does this by raising the duties on goods being shipped from Lebanon through Syria to Iraq, Jordan and the Persian Gulf. The Syrians have also used border closings as a means of exerting economic pressure on Lebanon.

Disagreements have been frequent over asylum granted by Lebanon to Syrian political refugees. In 1952, when Akram Haurani, Salah al-Din Bitar, and Michel 'Aflag fled to Lebanon and mounted an attack on the Shishakli regime, Syria closed the border for 24 hours in protest. In 1956, during the Suez crisis, the discovery of a Lebanon-based plot against the Syrian government by Syrian Intelligence led to a deterioration in relations between the two countries. In 1961, the Foreign Ministers of Syria and Lebanon reached an agreement on mutual cooperation in solving the problem of political subversion after discussions on the infiltration of UAR agents into Syria from Lebanon. In 1968, Syria found it necessary to impose higher duties as well as a tax on trucks engaged in the transit trade, as a retaliatory measure designed to force the Lebanese to suppress subversion and sabotage again at Syria that originated in Lebanon.

On the other hand, Syria has also served as a base for attempted political disruption in Lebanon. The most notable case was the Syrian intervention in the Lebanese civil war of 1958. At that time Lebanon was forced to complain to both the Arab League and the United Nations Security Council about Syrian actions. During the middle of May 1958, rioting broke out in protest against the possible revision of the Lebanese Constitution that would permit Lebanese President Chamoun to take office for a second six-year term, thus extending the tenure of a pro-Western government in Lebanon. Radio Cairo

and Radio Damascus urged the Lebanese to sustain the revolt and urged President Chamoun to resign. Actual aid to anti-government forces in Lebanon came from the Syrian sector of the UAR. The whole problem of Syrian intervention was, however, muted following the Iraqi coup d'etat on July 14 and the subsequent dispatch of United States troops to Lebanon by President Eisenhower at Lebanon's request.

The ties between Lebanon, the U.S. and the West in general have also formed the focal point of dissension between Syria and Lebanon. Generally speaking, Lebanon's position was a reflection of its commercial interests and the need to preserve them by ties to the West. Its large Christian population also exerted its influence. This pro-Western stance has been anathema to the anti-imperialist, Muslim and strongly nationalistic Syrian leadership. The fact that Lebanon accepted the Eisenhower Doctrine in 1957 and that it asked for aid from the United States in 1958 made it vulnerable to Syrian accusations that Lebanon was consorting with the enemy. Furthermore, Lebanon's refusal to act as a "confrontation" state during the 1950s and 1960s had an impact on the relationship during that period. Lebanon's territory was seen by Syrian military planners both as their soft belly vis-a-vis Israel and as a potential staging ground within an offensive scheme. Furthermore, Lebanese repression of Palestinian guerillas using Southern Lebanon as a staging ground for attacks on Israel led to Syrian support for the

Palestinians in their struggle against the Lebanese government as well as to infiltration of Sa'iq (Syrian based Palestinian Commandos) into Lebanon early in 1969. The tension over Lebanese actions against the Palestinians grew; in October, 1969, two large groups of armed Syrians attacked Lebanese border posts and the Syrian government again closed the border as a reaction against the attacks of the Lebanese army on Palestinian guerillas in Lebanon. During 1970, there was a considerable lessening of tension. Relations between Lebanon and Syria continued to be good until May 1973 when fighting erupted between the Palestine Liberation Army and the Lebanese Army. Syria responded by closing the border. The border closing was not attended by any drastic deterioration of relations and the Foreign Minister of Syria asserted that Syria had no desire to bring down the Lebanese regime, but that it only wished to help end the fighting. The Syrian government had, in fact, intervened with the Palestinians at one point for the release of Lebanese customs officials held by the guerillas. On June 3, 1974, the Syrian Foreign Minister noted that Syrian Lebanese relations were solidly based. By the end of 1974, Syria had not only offered to support Lebanon against attacks by Israel, which were launched in retaliation for Palestinian activities but it also promised to supply Lebanon with military aid. It is against this background of often fluctuating relations

between Syria and Lebanon that the current struggle in Lebanon must be viewed.⁷⁵

A. THE CIVIL WAR, 1975-1976

President Assad of Syria has, since the beginning of 1975, begun to revive the concept of "Greater Syria". In 1975, Lebanon's process of decline led to the outbreak of civil war. For six months, Syria was able to play another dual role - part-time supporter of its friends and clients in the opposition and part-time mediator and peace maker. That strategy collapsed at the end of 1975, and Assad was forced to choose a more decisive line.

The crisis of December, 1975 - January, 1976 revealed a complexity of considerations hitherto unfamiliar in Syrian foreign policy. In Lebanon itself, the situation threatened to get out of hand and Assad realized that he could not afford to accept the victory of either party to the civil war. Although the Maronites could not hope to re-establish their supremacy in the whole of Lebanon, some of them seemed determined to fall back upon the notion of a "smaller Christian Lebanon". This notion - a "Maronite Zion" - was anathema to Assad as well as to all Arab nationalists. The alternative, a victory of the leftist-Muslim Palestinian

⁷⁵This section quoted from Elizabeth L. Conroy, "Syria and Lebanon: The Background," in *The Syrian Arab Republic*, edited by Anne Sinai and Allen Pollack, New York, 1976, pp 80-83.

alliance, was equally repelling. It could result in an Israeli or other external intervention. In any case, Assad did not want to be sandwiched between a radical Iraq and radical Lebanon. "Decision military action in this sense in a country like Lebanon," Assad argued, "is impossible because the issue does not depend solely on might....there are other factors and conditions which must be available but are not present. By crushing the dominant Maronite political establishment, as Kamal Jumblatt and Yassir Arafat wanted to do," Assad continued, "a host of negative consequences would be created - international and Israeli intervention, partition and further division of Arab ranks - an ugly picture detrimental to Arab interests and objectives."

Assad, however, failed to mention another dimension that had been added to his calculations. For Syria seeking a regional and an international role, the crisis in Lebanon presented an opportunity as well as a challenge. By demonstrating that it and it alone could solve the crisis in Lebanon, Syria would prove to the U.S. that in that part of the Middle East one had to deal directly with Syria. The humiliating experience of 1973-74, when Syria was perceived and treated as Egypt's subordinate partner, would be written off. Syria would become an autonomous regional power, on a par with Egypt and Iraq, and able to deal confidently with both superpowers. The American factor, which had become paramount in his thinking, and the fear of Israeli

intervention confirmed his conviction that Syria's intervention should aim at consolidation and moderate reforms rather than radical transformation. In February, 1976, the Syrian leadership together with President Faranjiyyah prepared the "Reforms Document". This document resulted in an acrobatic renversement des alliances. Syria was now opposed by its former allies, who resented the limited change envisaged by Damascus and refused to accept Syrian domination. It was supported by the conservative, predominantly Maronite Lebanese Front, whose leaders saw the Syrians as (at least temporary) saviors.

There seemed to be an inescapable logic to the new turn of events. Most of the organizations and individuals constituting the National Front were willing to take up arms in order to obstruct Syria's new policy. The same considerations that had motivated Assad's intervention and initial direction now forced him to use his army against the Front. His interests in Lebanon itself and his regional ambitions had become far too important for Assad to tolerate defeat. It was also a classic case of interventionism - once the initial investment had been made, additional investments had to be made in order to justify its cost. In any event, the Syrian army in Lebanon found itself in the improbable position of fighting alongside conservative militias against the PLO and the Druze militia of Kamal Jumblatt.

In September, 1976, the Syrian army came close to crushing its rivals, but Saudi Arabia's intercession prevented a military decision. The Riyadh Conference in October, 1976 formalized the ambiguity with which the fighting ended. The Arab consensus recognized Syria's hegemony in Lebanon, which condition it legitimized by accepting Syria's military presence in the guise of an Arab Deterrent Force and agreeing to subsidize it. Syria, however, was forced to accept the continued presence and role in Lebanon of the PLO and some of its other rivals.

The mixed results of the Riyadh Conference were illustrative of Syria's regional and international standing in late 1976 and 1977. Syria achieved an unprecedented degree of prestige and influence that was, to a considerable extent, a consequence of its achievements in Lebanon. In 1977, Assad met with Soviet and American leaders on his own terms, and played a cardinal role in obstructing U.S. President Carter's efforts to deal with the Arab-Israeli conflict through an international conference. Assad's new relationship with the Maronite militias of the Lebanese Front was perplexing. The militias were the most powerful local force, but cooperation with them was difficult and ideologically awkward. Assad realized that Lebanon could not be annexed or even taken over in a brief span of time. Syrian supremacy had to be consolidated and formalized over time.

B. PERIOD OF 1977-1982

After the crushing of the National Front, Syria faced an increasing challenge in Lebanon posed by Israel and the Lebanese Front. Israel's Menachem Begin, during his first two years in office, continued the Lebanese policy of his predecessor, Yitzhak Rabin. In the summer of 1979, however, Begin authorized greater support of and commitment to Bashir Jumayyil and his militias. One common goal of the Israeli-Maronite alliance was to challenge and weaken Syrian supremacy in Lebanon, which had been accepted, with reservations, as an unavoidable evil in 1976.

There was little that Assad could do against this challenge until the end of 1980. By that time, he had defeated his domestic rivals, signed a treaty of friendship and cooperation with the Soviet Union and completed an important part of his military build-up plan. He had not closed the "strategic gap" with Israel that had been opened by Egypt's departure from the Arab consensus in 1977, but he felt that Syria had the military capability to challenge Israel even if the challenge were likely to trigger an Israeli military reaction.

The series of challenges and counter-challenges posed, respectively, by Israel and the Lebanese (Front) forces and by Syria finally led to a showdown at Zahle: the so-called "missile crisis" of the spring and early summer of 1981. Syria did not seek a showdown and was probably not interested

in a military clash with Israel, but the prospect of Lebanese forces' take-over of Zahle was simply unacceptable to Syria. Zahle is situated in the Bekaa Valley, the part of Lebanon considered most vital to Syria's national security. A Lebanese forces' outpost in Zahle and a possible link up with Israel were perceived as a grave threat to Syria's position in Lebanon and, indeed, to Syria proper. The "missile crisis" of 1981 was an important link in the chain of events that led to the June, 1982 war. In several respects it can also be seen as a dress rehearsal for that war. This war was imposed on the Syrians who were defeated badly in Lebanon. After a few weeks, the Palestinian forces were defeated and evacuated from Beirut and South Lebanon.

C. THE PERIOD OF 1982 - PRESENT

The complications of the Israeli operation enabled Syria to save some of its positions in Lebanon towards the end of June. When the PLO had left Beirut and Bashir Jumayyil had been elected President of Lebanon, the future of Syria's influence seemed bleak. During this period, two characteristics of Assad's political style became fully evident - his perseverance and his ruthlessness. The assassination of Bashir Jumayyil was but one of the measures initiated by Syria during the late summer and autumn of 1982 in order to salvage its position in Lebanon.

For some time, Syria's efforts were solely concerned with that salvaging operation. Syria's position in Lebanon had to be restored and Syria's enemies and competitors (the U.S., Israel and the Lebanese forces) removed or subdued. With the passage of time and as the success of Syria's efforts in Lebanon became more apparent, additional and more ambitious goals were added. Lebanon became the focal point of regional politics, and since Syria could rely on several advantages in Lebanon, it could realistically aspire to regain the regional and international prominence it had briefly enjoyed in 1976-77.

Syria, indeed, regained its regional and international prominence, restored its supremacy in Lebanon and proved that it had a staying power more than all other states involved in Lebanon. By this supremacy, Syria subdued Arafat's followers and Muslim fanatics in the City of Tripoli in North Lebanon. It obstructed the implementation of the Reagan plan of September, 1982. By so doing, Syria not only thwarted an objectionable development but also demonstrated, once again, that the U.S. could not afford to ignore, let alone snub, Damascus. It was, in addition, an excellent way of offering a service to the Soviet Union that was fully congruent with Syria's own interests. The Soviet Union, by rehabilitating Syria's ground-to-air missile system at the end of 1982, had played a crucial role in rebuilding Syria's position in Lebanon. Syria destroyed the May 17, 1983 agreement between Israel and

Lebanon which was engineered and orchestrated by the United States because Syria viewed the May 17 agreement as a leaf from the tree planted at Camp David.⁷⁶

The Syrian presence in Lebanon is indispensable for the survival of any Lebanese polity. On different occasions the Lebanese political leaders resorted to Damascus for help. On February 25, 1980, the situation deteriorated badly in Lebanon. The Lebanese leaders including Premier Selim Hoss rushed to Damascus to plead for a delay in the Syrian withdrawal. Saudi Arabia and other oil-producing states offered to raise the stipend of \$50 million per month that they were paying Syria for its forces in Lebanon.⁷⁷ On September 20, 1985, Premier Rashid Karami appealed for Syrian military intervention to end Lebanon's civil war.⁷⁸ On June 17, 1985, the News Week Magazine mentioned that President Amin Gemayel appealed for Syrian military intervention. He visited Damascus and asked President Assad to send extra troops to help the Lebanese Army disarm warring militias and maintain order.⁷⁹

⁷⁶This section is quoted from Itamar Rabinovich - Syria under Assad, pp 181-187.

⁷⁷Time, February 25, 1980, p. 30.

⁷⁸The Associated Press, Section: International News, September 21, 1985.

⁷⁹Rod Nordland, 'The Syrians are Coming', News Week, June 17, 1985, p. 59.

D. THE SYRIAN OBJECTIVES IN LEBANON

I would like to mention here the opinion of a great Lebanese Socialite - Karim Pakradouni - concerning the Syrian objectives in Lebanon. Karim Pakradouni, a lawyer and member of the Phalangist's politburo, pro-Syrian, was senior advisor and confidant to both Lebanese ex-President Sarkis and the late President-elect Bachir Gemayel. Pakradouni summarized to us the Syrian demands in Lebanon as follows: a) Syria expects the Lebanese army to be its ally not its enemy. Therefore, the Syrians want to ensure their control over the Lebanese army. They insist on having a major role in the appointment of the Lebanese Army Commander, the Director of Military Investigations, and the General Director for National Security. b) Syria wants to control the Lebanese foreign policy. c) Syria would not accept any Arab or foreign intervention in Lebanon, whether this intervention is intended to solve Lebanese-Lebanese, Lebanese-Palestinian, or Lebanese-Syrian conflicts. d) Syria has ensured the failure of several U.S.-sponsored mediation efforts the goals of which were to solve Lebanese-Syrian disputes. e) Every act done without the participation of Damascus will be rejected, no matter what positive results it may bring about. Every act in which Damascus participates shall be accepted, no matter how dangerous the results may be. f) Syria has thus succeeded in demonstrating to the World that the road to Lebanon runs through Damascus; conversely, it has made the Palestinians

and Lebanese realize that the road to the outside World leads through Damascus.⁸⁰

⁸⁰Karim Pakradouni, "Assad's Syria and the Politics of Change," Middle East Insight, pp 4-6. (I could not find the publishing date of this article, but from the context, I guess it was published after 1983.)

XII. SYRIA AND JORDAN

Till the end of the Ottoman period, the territories that later comprised Syria and Jordan shared much in common, from geography to economics and linguistics. The historical and administrative concept of Syria, furthermore, usually included most of Transjordan.

The establishment of Transjordan as a political entity separated from Syria stemmed from considerations that were irrelevant both to historical developments and the desires of the indigenous inhabitants. That separation, together with the differences between the two forms of foreign rule that both countries experienced, somewhat blurred the common denominators, sharpened existing differences and created new ones.

With independence, and the passage of time, the respective regimes of the two countries have taken utterly different directions. Syria, an authoritarian republic, built up an impressive military force with the ambition, as well as the potential capability, of becoming a leading Middle Eastern power. The pattern of its global and regional alliances has shown a tendency to prefer the Soviet bloc and the radical Arab regimes. Jordan, a traditional yet fairly enlightened monarchy, also developed an efficient professional army but one designated (in the last 30 odd years, at least) to preserve the regime and defend the country rather than to

back an aggressive regional and foreign policy. In contrast to Syria, Jordan has persisted in its preference for a pro-Western orientation and alignment with moderate Middle Eastern states.

Syria has championed the cause of the Palestinians, while often ruthlessly suppressing the PLO. For Jordan, the attitude towards the Palestinian was not only a question of expediency - as it was for Syria - but also a matter of survival. Jordan, too, sometimes followed a repressive policy towards the PLO, but constantly adhered to a policy that considered the Palestinians and the Transjordanians as two segments of the same people and country.

These differences between Syria and Jordan, which have become increasingly more pronounced, have given rise to frequent fluctuation in their mutual relations. On several occasions, the two states attempted to merge into one political entity. On the other hand, diplomatic relations between them have been severed at least as frequently, and in four instances, the two countries seemed headed towards large-scale armed conflict. Such extreme ups and downs are uncommon even within the inter-Arab system, which have in general been characterized by rapid shifts from violent animosity to declarations of eternal friendship. Tracing the precise causes of these fluctuations cannot possibly be done within the confines of a brief section of this paper; however, an overview of the history of Syrian-Jordanian

bilateral relations as well as a brief analysis of some of the most conspicuous determinants of Jordanian policy is feasible.

A. JORDAN'S POLICY UNDER ABDALLAH

Jordanian interest in Syria dates from the beginning of Hashemite rule in Amman. Abdallah ibn Hussein, founder of the Emirate of Transjordan, and its ruler for 30 years, arrived in that area in 1921. He had come from the Hijaz with the declared intention of advancing into Syria; at the time, he contemplated taking revenge upon the French for their usurpation of the throne of Damascus from his brother Faysal. Eventually, he settled for much less: Colonial Secretary Winston Churchill's offer of the remote desert emirate provided Abdallah with a good enough excuse to change his mind. Nevertheless, during the 1910s and 1930s, Abdallah's name was mentioned more than once as a candidate for the kingship of Syria.

After the outbreak of World War II, Abdallah initiated and publicized the "Greater Syria" scheme that called for the unification of Syria, Lebanon, Transjordan and Palestine under his throne. Henceforth, that scheme became the cornerstone of all his diplomatic efforts. In spite of strong opposition on the part of almost all the parties concerned, he adhered to his territorial goals until his assassination in July, 1951. His only achievement in this respect - the annexation of Arab Palestine in 1948 - was described as the fulfillment of the

first stage of the Greater Syria scheme. In 1946, when both Syria and Transjordan (henceforth Jordan) gained their independence, Abdallah's tactics became nothing short of intervention in Syria's domestic affairs. Syria reciprocated by filing a complaint to the Arab League, launching a propaganda campaign and granting political asylum to opposition activists from Amman. Abdallah retaliated by closing his consulate in Damascus.

The three coups d'etat that took place in Syria in 1949 and the subsequent changes in its political orientation affected ties with Jordan. There was tension and hostility between the two nations under Za'im, rapid improvement in relations after Hinnawi took over and occasional ups and downs under Shishakli. Sometimes relations between the two nations were influenced by developments not directly associated with bilateral issues. In early 1950, for example, tension between the two countries mounted because of rumors (not unfounded) about Israeli-Jordanian peace negotiations and their reaching of an agreement.

The assassination of King Abdallah in July, 1951 not only marked the end of a chapter in Jordan's history, but also heralded a new era in its relations with Syria. Up to that point, Abdallah had dominated the scene, his policy towards Syria having been mainly based on his personal and dynastic considerations. Though he was not the first Arab statesman to push for union with Syria, he was the only one to insist

that Jordan, under his leadership, be the core of that unified entity. Thus, it would not be unreasonable to assume that Abdallah aspired to a greater Jordan rather than to a Greater Syria.

B. THE IMPACT OF HUSSEIN

Hussein's ascendancy to the throne channelled relations between the two countries into an "ordinary" bilateral pattern. The conduct of the young monarch within the inter-Arab system indicated the return of Jordan to its true political size: Hussein neither introduced grandiose unity schemes nor contemplated shaping other Arab regimes in his own image. As a result, Syria gradually became the dominant factor in their bilateral relations.

Hussein's first years on the throne were years of grace. They were characterized by gradually improved ties with Syria, leading, in 1955, to the resumption of full diplomatic relations. From 1955-57, correctly referred to as "Hussein's Arab-nationalist era", Jordan was closer than ever to its militant Arab neighbors. Its non-admittance to the Baghdad Pact, together with the dismissal of John B. Glubb and the rest of the British officers from its army accelerated cordial relations with Syria.

The period that followed showed a deterioration in these friendly relations that was even more rapid. The turning point came in April, 1957, when a coup d'etat by some

Jordanian army officers was nipped in the bud and Jordan's provocative national-socialist prime minister was dismissed. Although Syria was not behind the plot, it was sympathetic to the conspirators and granted political asylum to the scores of army officers and civilian politicians who escaped from Jordan. In the second half of 1957, their common border was closed, diplomatic relations were broken off and propaganda warfare was commenced.

The tension between the two countries stepped up early in 1958, when Egypt and Syria merged into the United Arab Republic (UAR), and gave way to violence. Armed groups, trained in Syria for subversive activities, infiltrated into Jordan. Relations undoubtedly reached their lowest ebb in November, 1958, when Syrian Migs intercepted Hussein's private jet (flown by the king himself) enroute to Europe and forced him to return to Amman.

Jordan's rejection of the idea of a Palestinian entity (promoted by Egypt and Iraq in 1959) only made matters worse. Terrorist attacks from Syria against Jordanian targets continued, reaching a peak in August, 1960 with the assassination of the prime minister, Haza 'al-Majali. The murderers escaped to Syria and Jordan attributed the crime to the UAR intelligence services.

Despite the merger of Egypt and Syria and notwithstanding their common foreign policy, a distinct pattern of Jordanian-Syrian relations between 1958 and 1961 can still be traced.

During this period, Jordan disregarded Syrian violence, to which it had been subjected before and after the foundation of the UAR, and took pains to demonstrate hostility vis-a-vis Egypt in order to cultivate Syrian goodwill. Insinuating that Egypt was working against both Syria and Jordanian interests and diverting the relations between the two from their "natural" course, Jordanian broadcasts urged the Syrians to liberate themselves from the Egyptian yoke.

Upon the dissolution of the UAR in 1961, Jordan was the first country to recognize Syria and to offer its support against political attacks by Egypt and other Arab states for breaking an "historical" union and becoming an isolationist. These improved relations lasted for a brief interlude as the Ba'athist revolution in 1963 widened the ideological gap between the two countries.

A slight improvement in Syrian-Jordanian bilateral relations in 1964-65 was soon checked by the establishment of the PLO - with the blessing of the inter-Arab system - and the revival of Palestinian nationalism. Syria developed the idea of a "popular war of liberation" (against Israel) and made Fatah its protege. Jordan, less than happy about the concept of a Palestinian renaissance, was forced to choose between acquiescence or confrontation within the inter-Arab system. The split between Jordan and the PLO in 1966 placed further strain on already tense Syrian-Jordanian relations. By the end of May, 1967, the two countries were on the brink of open

conflict, and it may be plausibly assumed that the outbreak of the Six Day War prevented escalation into all-out hostilities.

After a year in isolation, Jordan was provided by the 1967 war and its outcome with renewed legitimacy among the Arab states, Syria included. Conflicts over the Palestinian issue, however, were to crop up again. Syria unequivocally supported the Palestinian organizations whenever they were involved in battles with Jordanian authorities. In September, 1970, Syria went so far as to send an armored division into Jordanian territory to reinforce the Palestinians during the Black September showdown with Hussein's army. When Jordan once again operated against the Palestinians in July, 1971, Syria severed diplomatic relations and closed the border.

The outbreak of the Yom Kippur War found both countries in the midst of a gradual and cautious rapprochement. In 1975 and 1976, the two countries were on the verge of a union. A common supreme leadership was established, and practical measures for merging several systems (civil as well as military) were taken. Both parties benefited. Jordan became the only Arab state to back the Syrian intervention in Lebanon, while Syria recognized Jordan's special status regarding the Palestine question. President Assad publicly supported Hussein's federation scheme as a solution to that problem.

In 1977, the Jordanian-Syrian relations deteriorated and the gap widened by Syria's not unfounded suspicions that

members of the Muslim Brotherhood, its most dangerous internal opposition, had escaped to Jordan. In reaction to Syria's mounting hostility, Jordan was quick to improve relations with Iraq, Syria's ideological and political arch-enemy. On several occasions, the Syrians produced Moslem Brotherhood suspects who said on Damascus radio and television that they were trained at camps in Jordan with help from Jordanian intelligence officers. When President Assad met King Hussein at the funeral of President Tito in Yugoslavia in 1980 and confronted him with the charges, the Jordanian ruler denied them categorically.⁸¹

The unavoidable outcome was a new crisis; in December, 1980, Jordan and Syria came very close to violent confrontation as massive military concentrations were deployed along the common border. It took several weeks of Saudi mediation to defuse the tension, which only mounted again in early 1981, following the kidnapping of the Jordanian military attache in Beirut and the uncovering of a plot to assassinate the prime minister. Jordan accused Rif'at Assad, brother of the Syrian president, of initiating and organizing the murder attempt; Syria retaliated by sending a few Palestinian groups to operate against Israel through Jordanian territory, thereby embarrassing Hussein.

⁸¹The New York Times, "Jordanian Prime Minister to Syria," by Ihsan A. Hijazi, Section A, p. 3, column 4.

The war in Lebanon in 1982 only increased the tension; the unclear future of the PLO, after having lost its territorial base in Beirut, sharply exposed the divergence of opinions between Jordan and Syria regarding that organization and the Palestine question in general. Syria was apprehensive lest Arafat's weakened position produce a rapprochement between him and Hussein and Jordan be granted the desirable mandate to negotiate a political settlement. Such possibilities placed Syria's vital interests and ideological tenets in jeopardy. The first round of Hussein-Arafat talks in March-April, 1983 were followed by extreme Syrian pressure on both sides in order to thwart the dialogue. Syria encouraged the split within the PLO and the challenge to Arafat's leadership. In fact, respective reactions to the internal struggles of the PLO somewhat reflected Syrian-Jordanian relations in general. Syria made considerable efforts to replace or at least constrain Arafat, and thereby guarantee an obedient, pro-Syrian organization; Jordan remained ostensibly passive, expecting Arafat to make the next move; in fact, most of the events that either fostered advancement or caused regression in their bilateral relations originated from Syria. In 1983, a Syrian proposal for military coordination with Jordan to counter an Israeli attack on Syria through Jordan had been rejected.⁸²

⁸²Middle East International, Issue 202, p.6, "Jordan: Be Prepared," by Abu Nab Ibrahim, June 10, 1983.

In 1985, Hussein sent his Prime Minister Zaid Rifai to Syria for reconciliation talks with Syrian President Hafez Assad, who had long accused Jordan of harboring Moslem Brotherhood opponents of his rule. Hussein emphatically insisted that he had learned only recently that Jordan had been used as a base by subversives operating against Syria. This "minority," he said, had "deceived" him and the vast majority of Jordanians.⁸³ According to some diplomats in the Syrian and Jordanian capitals, Jordan took this step of reconciliation because it had been forced to accept the Syrian position that the only way to negotiate with Israel is as an Arab bloc, operating from a united stand backed by a strong military force.⁸⁴

C. THE DETERMINANTS OF JORDANIAN-SYRIAN RELATIONS

Broadly speaking, Jordanian-Syrian relations were determined by seven factors: 1) the dynastic ambitions of the Hashemites, 2) the Greater Syria scheme, 3) domestic social processes and historical processes, 4) the changing military balance, 5) economic dependence, 6) inter-Arab pressures and 7) ideological and structural differences.

⁸³The Washington Post, "Hussein Curbs Fundamentalists," by Samira Kavar, Section A21, December 27, 1985.

⁸⁴The Washington Post, "Rapprochement Seen Dooming Peace Move," by Loren Jenkins, First Section, A10, December 24, 1985.

1. The Dynastic Ambitions of the Hashemites.

As was mentioned early in this section, King Abdallah ascribed the utmost importance to Syria in both dynastic and pan-Arab terms, considering that country a family realm, as his brother Faysal was its first ruler after the disintegration of the Ottoman empire.

2. The Greater Syria Scheme.

Aside from his dynastic aspirations, Abdallah considered Syria the historical and territorial center of the Arab nation. He saw the re-establishment of the historical bilad-al-sham (Syria's ancient Arabic name) as the most important territorial objective of the Arab revolt in World War I. He referred to Greater Syria (Surriya al-Kubra) not only as an historical entity, but also as a natural (Surriya-al-tab'iyya) and geographical (Surriya al-Jughrafiyya) entity. Abdallah, moreover, developed a series of arguments to substantiate his claim to rule over Greater Syria.

King Hussein has also made extensive use of the Hashemite heritage and the memory of the Arab revolt. His deep emotional commitment to the legacy of Abdallah is evident. Nevertheless, he has made no efforts to fulfill his grandfather's ambitions or to utilize his ideas politically or ideologically.

Upon the accession to power of Hafez al-Assad, the tables turned. Assad exploited the concept of Greater Syria for his own ends, to justify his intervention in Lebanon (and

later, the refusal to withdraw) and to threaten recalcitrant Arab colleagues. Yassir Arafat's somewhat critical reference in 1974 to Syria patronization of the PLO was immediately followed by Assad's statement that Palestine had no independent standing and was actually Southern Syria. The rapprochement that brought Jordan and Syria to the brink of union in 1975-76 was considered by foreign observers as a Syrian attempt at Syrian-Jordan "integration". The Greater Syria objective was not ignored by King Hussein, who eventually rejected all proposed measures that would have made the "integration" irreversible. The idea of Greater Syria, so aggressively promoted by King Abdallah, now made contemporary Jordan a potential victim of Syrian ambitions of geographical expansion. Jordan's Crown Prince Hassan once complained that "the Syrians say there are no Palestinians, Jordanians, Lebanese - that they are all Southern Syrians".

3. Domestic Social Processes.

The territory composing the Emirate of Transjordan in the 1920s (and later, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan) had never been an integrated administrative or political unit before Abdallah assumed the throne. Throughout history, considerable portions of that area had been administered from Damascus for rather long periods, beginning with the rule of the Umayyad dynasty (seventh-eighth centuries A.D.). Under the Ottoman empire, Northern and Central Transjordan were part of the vilayet of Sham (the provinces of Syria). When

Abdallah established himself in Transjordan, his administration was largely based on Syrian personnel. Moreover, all his prime ministers until 1931 were Syrians. Consequently, many inhabitants of the northern part of Transjordan, especially the Ajlun area, remained Damascus-oriented for years after the establishment of a central administration in Amman. Most of the officers that were involved in plots to topple the Jordanian regime, such as Abdallah al-Tall, Mahmud al-Rusan and Sadiq al-Shara came from Ajlun, and Ali Hiyari and Ali Abu Nuwar came from Balqaa. Many conspirators and opposition leaders escaped to Syria, which granted them political asylum. Some of the Bedouin tribes in the north are pro-Syria. They threaten to cross the border and join their brothers in Syria in order to extract various concessions or benefits from the authorities.

4. The Changing Military Balance.

The unitary territorial ambitions of the Hashemites (and of Abdallah, in particular) during the late 1940s and early 1950s constituted a viable threat for Syria because of its military strength vis-a-vis Jordan (and Iraq). Jordan's British-equipped, trained and commanded Arab Legion, a professional standing army, was considered by many as the best Arab force. The Legion outnumbered the young, ill-trained "Troupes speciales du Levant" of the mandatory period that had been trained and commanded by the French. Inferior to the Legion units in its scope, quality and military experience, the

Syrian Army in 1948 also had rather meager achievement in comparison. The military gap was gradually narrowed during the 1950s, and the balance began changing in favor of Syria. Syria constantly increased its military edge over Jordan.

The fear of Syrian military power and apprehension that it might use it have become, since the late 1960s, a dominant factor influencing Jordan's attitude towards its neighbor.

5. Jordan's Dependence on Syria.

Because of political and geographical constraints and particularly the absence of an outlet to the Mediterranean, most of Jordan's links to Europe have passed through Syrian territory or air space, consequently making Jordan considerably economically dependent on Syria. This dependence has been augmented in recent years, since most of Jordan's revenue comes from hundreds of small factories engaged in production for the Syrian market and for the Gulf. The need to utilize Syrian air space to Europe has also had political repercussions, as in the case of the Syrian interception of King Hussein's plane in November, 1958.

This dependence has both affected bilateral relations, reinforcing Syrian dominance, and has been influenced by them. Whenever a deterioration in relations led to conflict, Syria did not hesitate to take advantage of Jordanian dependency by closing the border, an action that proved to be an effective weapon more than once.

The political implications of this dependence sometimes exceeded certain limits for Jordan. It forced Jordan to solicit Israel's good will, which was not only humiliating but also hazardous, owing to the Arab reaction that such a move could evoke. In 1958, British troops were hastened to Amman to protect Hussein and his regime. Because of Syria's hostile attitude, the only possible flight course from British bases in Europe and Cyprus was via Israel's air space. The Israelis consented and Hussein was forced to acquiesce. Several months later, he found himself in a similar situation when the Americans obtained permission to fly oil to him from the Gulf through Israel's air space.

6. The Inter-Arab System.

The fear of the Hashemites and of Abdallah's initiatives had originally pushed Syria into a bloc with Egypt and Saudi Arabia with the founding of the Arab League. In spite of the political and ideological regroupings of the 1950s and the changing alliances and coalitions, Syria and Jordan remained in different camps.

Syria has generally enjoyed a more senior status in the Arab World than has Jordan because of the former's size, location and political importance. Concomitant with growing prominence of the inter-Arab system - mainly during the 1960s and 1970s - Syria's influence increased and Jordan became obliged, even more than before, to take Syria's views into

account. This development fostered gradual Syrian dominance in their bilateral relations.

7. Different Ideologies, Different Levels of Stability.

The frequent fluctuations in Syrian-Jordanian relations should also be attributed to the different nature of the respective regimes and, in particular, to the differences in their internal strength. Whereas Jordan has been ruled for more than 30 years by the same monarch, and for 30 years before that by his predecessor, rule in Syria has frequently been challenged, usually by force. In 1949 alone, Syria experienced three take-overs, each ushering in a new regime that possessed different views, inter alia, towards Jordan. Internal instability was one of the hallmarks of Syrian regimes during the 1950s and 1960s, and bilateral relations with Jordan often reflected political agitation in Damascus. Although it is true that Syria has now been ruled by the same man for the past 18 years and that his regime has been amazingly stable and durable, basic ideological disagreements that existed before Assad came to power continue among Syria's different political-religious groupings and must also be taken into consideration.

Jordan, a monarchy that has been consistently pro-Western, possesses both a form of government and a political orientation that are not too popular in the contemporary Middle East. Syria, on the other hand, is a republic, having

ideologically associated with progressive Arab nationalism. As a result of this basic ideological gap between the countries, cordial relations arising from pragmatic considerations (such as rapprochements of 1956, 1961, 1975-76 and 1986) usually did not last. Political realism may sometimes override ideological differences, but the sort of cooperation that can then be obtained is vulnerable and exposed to agitation.

Ideological differences provide an explanation, too, for the relatively frequent Syrian-sponsored attempts to topple the Jordanian regime. From the Syrian point of view, abolition of the Jordanian monarchy might also narrow the ideological gap and pave the way for closer links. It might eventually lead to Syrian hegemony.⁸⁵

This type of fluctuation in Syrian-Jordanian relations will continue till a just and comprehensive settlement in the Middle East be achieved.

⁸⁵This section (Syria and Jordan) is quoted from Joseph Nevo, "Syria and Jordan: The Politics of Subversion," in Syria under Assad, edited by Moshe Maoz and Avner Yaniv, St. Martin Press, New York, 1986, pp 140-152.

XIII. SYRIA AND THE PLO

Syria's policy towards the PLO, especially with regard to Fatah, the organization's mainstay since 1968, has fluctuated with bewildering intensity from support and collaboration to suppression and persecution. Having virtually baptized al-Fatah as a guerilla organization in 1964, thereafter championing its cause, training its personnel and providing its equipment, the Syrians proceeded to turn against it within less than half a decade. In 1966, Syria arrested the entire Fatah leadership for about 40 days. In 1970, Syria again changed course, embraced the PLO and even went as far as invading Jordan with a view to rescuing Fatah from the fury of Hussein's troops. Fully supportive of the PLO/Fatah for the next half-decade, Syria once again turned against it in the course of the 1975-76 civil war in Lebanon. Less than two years later, a Syrian-PLO rapprochement took place, cooperation between the two entities developed and lasted until the autumn of 1982. Following the PLO's massive defeat at the hands of the Israelis, Syria turned against it yet again, instigated a violent rebellion within its ranks and then proceeded to conduct a war of nerves against the Palestinian organization.

How can one account for these radical fluctuations in the Syrian attitude to Fatah? Were Syria's actions a reflection of whimsical changes in the preferences of individual Syrian

leaders? Or were they inspired by ideological considerations? Was its conduct motivated by a cynical pursuit of self interest? Or was it, perhaps, a combination of all these factors? Given the impenetrability of the Syrian "black box" where policies are determined, options canvassed and critical decisions formulated, a definitive answer to such questions seems impossible. Nevertheless, an overview of Syrian policy towards the PLO in general and Fatah in particular since the early 1960s does offer a number of plausible clues.

In the first place, Syria's support of the PLO hinges on the latter's conforming to Syria's ideological objectives. A PLO that drifts too far afield from the prevailing ideological orthodoxy in Damascus is likely to be subject to extreme pressures. An ideologically quiescent PLO, on the other hand, is likely to enjoy Syria's unswerving support.

Second, and perhaps of greater importance during the reign of Hafez al-Assad than previously, Syria's attitude towards the PLO/Fatah is determined by the degree to which that organization has been inclined to subordinate its own practical and immediate priorities to Syria. If the Syrian national interest dictates militancy (for instance, against Israel), the PLO should toe the line.

Indeed, from the PLO's point of view, it all boils down to one and the same thing: if the organization wishes to survive, it cannot afford to defy Syria abrasively. Yet, if its own

policies are restricted to the narrow confines of the Syrian national interest, the PLO's ability to advance its own goals is severely, perhaps fatally, limited. This predicament has not always been painful in the same degree; but after two decades of PLO-Syrian relations, it seems to have become a conspicuous and even an enduring pattern.

A. THE FORMATIVE YEARS, 1964-1975

Syria's relations with the PLO, more precisely, with organization's backbone, Fatah, were born of the challenge to Nasserism. As early as 1958, Syria had pressed Nasser to resume fedayeen action against Israel. Unwilling to face a war with Israel, the Egyptian president refused. Late in 1964, the Syrian regime was ready to translate this challenge to Nasser from diplomacy into military action against the Jewish state. The logic of this departure was simple enough. Both domestically and in the wider Arab context, the Syrian regime could not criticize Nasser incessantly while declining to take any risks itself. If, on the other hand, Syria were to initiate small-scale hostilities with Israel and face Israeli retributions, it could always employ this sacrifice as a means of further challenging Nasser's lead in the Arab World.

The chief architect of this policy was the head of Syria's military intelligence, Colonel Ahmad Suwydani. By 1964, Suwydani succeeded in obtaining the blessings of his superiors

as well as the consent of Yasir Arafat and the nascent Fatah organization. Arafat was fully aware, of course, of the fact that the Syrians meant to use Fatah for their own ends. But since he and his colleagues share, for their own reasons, Syria's criticism of Nasser, they were quite prepared to collaborate with Suwydani's design. On January 1, 1965, Syria permitted the Assifa (Fatah's operational arm) to undertake its first raid against Israel. The troubled partnership between Syria and Fatah was thus baptized in military action.

With Syrian and Lebanese help, Fatah's military raids against Israel drew a great deal of attention in the Arab World and presented a severe challenge to the Egyptian-sponsored PLO under Ahmad Shukairi. This latter organization was seemingly far larger and better endowed than Fatah. In practice, however, it was strictly prohibited by Egypt from engaging in military activities. Nasser's response to the Arafat-Syrian challenge was double-edged. He pressed most Arab governments to deny Fatah any help, especially through publicity, finance and permission to operate against Israel. Solidly backed by Syria and, owing to this, beyond Nasser's reach, Fatah could ignore Nasser and carry on its operations. Nevertheless, Nasser's campaign against Fatah had one important effect: Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon would not permit the organization to operate from their territories. Fatah, therefore, became entirely dependent on Syria's goodwill.

During the latter part of 1965, the Syrians were divided on whether or not to permit Fatah members to cross into Israel from Syrian territory, and the organization suffered a certain loss of freedom. Following the J'did coup February 23, 1966, it seemed for a moment that this militant Syrian regime would at last allow Fatah all the freedom to operate which the organization demanded. In fact, the opposite took place. Within two months of the coup, it became clear that the new regime was, if anything, even less inclined than the previous regime to allow Fatah real freedom of action. Friction between Syria and Fatah could be discerned on two critical issues. The first was ideological: the J'did regime sought to impose its militant brand of Ba'athism on Arafat's pragmatically oriented organization. The second bone of contention was practical, namely, the degree to which Fatah raiding parties should be subject to Syrian army control. Faced with stiff Fatah resistance, the J'did regime attempted to oust Arafat and replace him with its own man, Captain Yousef Ourabi. Failing this, the Syrian authorities in May, 1966, suddenly jailed the entire Fatah leadership.

Arafat and his associates were released after 40 days. What apparently saved the Fatah leadership from long imprisonment was a shift in Egyptian policy. Nasser decided about this time to authorize Shukairi's PLO to adopt the Fatah method of armed struggle, provided that operations would be carried out from Lebanese and Jordanian territories. Thus

Syria's claim of being the only Arab government to allow the Palestinians to pursue the armed struggle was suddenly challenged. In response the Syrians freed Arafat and his colleagues and stepped up support for their cause. Syria, however, also set up a rival Palestinian organization - the Palestine Liberation Front, under the command of Ahmad Gibril, a Palestinian officer in the Syrian army. This rival to Fatah capitalized on the Palestinian cause without claiming as much autonomy as Arafat's Fatah. Indirectly, the move to set up the PLF also reflected rivalries among the ruling Ba'ath elite. Whereas, Suwydani and, increasingly, Hafez-Assad sponsored the Fatah, their rival, Colonel Abdal-Karim Jundi, acted as patron to the PLF.

The intensification of the activities of Fatah, of the PLF and of the PLO against the background of fierce rivalry between Nasser, Jeddid and King Hussein of Jordan ultimately hastened the escalation in the conflict with Israel which led to the 1967 war. Following this catastrophe, Syria and the PLO did not change course but, if anything, increased the emphasis on revolutionary warfare. A popular liberation struggle based on the population of the West Bank and Gaza could, therefore, be presented as the only viable alternative. This was Fatah's view. It also served well the Syrian challenge to Nasser's declining leadership.

As part of Fatah's effort to establish bases of operation in the Israeli occupied West Bank, Syria provided the

organization with three to four training centers in the vicinity of Damascus. All bases were supervised by the Operations Division of the Syrian General Staff. In addition, the Syrians set up a command post in Dera (on the Jordanian border), whose task was to guide Fatah squads enroute to the West Bank through Jordan.

The transfer of the center of Fatah activity to the West Bank and, subsequently, to Jordan gave the organization an unprecedented degree of freedom from Syrian control. After the 1967 war, moreover, Egypt rejected Shukairi and endorsed Arafat's leadership, not only of Fatah, but also (as of August, 1968) of the entire PLO. Syria attempted to buttress its flagging influence on the Palestinian movement by further consolidating its own Palestinian organizations. Thus, during the spring of 1968, Syria unified three separate Palestinian Ba'athist organizations - the Popular Palestine Liberation Front, the Pioneers of the Popular Liberation War and the Upper Galilee Liberation Organization - into one entity under the title al-Saika. Within a short time, the Saika organization took Fatah's place as Syria's main Palestinian client. Formally, it became a constituent organization within the new PLO under Yassir Arafat's chairmanship. In practice, Saika remained largely subordinate to the Syrian Ba'ath Party.

These important changes in Syria's relations with Fatah did not, however, result in a new crisis. For his part,

Arafat was careful to avoid friction with the Syrians while seeking to reduce their influence over the PLO. The Syrians reciprocated Arafat's prudent policy. Consequently, relations between Syria and the PLO remained close enough to withstand their first major test, the 1970 civil war in Jordan.

Syria's decision to invade Jordan in order to rescue the PLO from the wrath of Hussein's troops in 1970 was apparently taken by J'did. Once the invasion was under way, the Syrian air force, which was under Assad's command, declined to give the invading armored column critically needed air cover. Strategically, Assad was, of course, right, since Syrian air force participation in the fighting would have tilted the balance against Hussein. In that event, Israel and the United States, both of whom were determined to save the Hashemite king, would have intervened. Thus by denying air support to the armored column, Assad saved Syria a possible debacle of major proportions.

The invasion failed. J'did blamed Assad for the failure and tried to remove Assad from office. Assad had no alternative but to resist the move, which he did with a coup d'etat on November 13, 1970.

During the next five years, Syrian policy towards the PLO seemingly did not change. The PLO was permitted to recoup from its disaster in Jordan by operating from Lebanon, largely with Syrian blessing. In the final analysis, however, the

deterioration of Lebanon as a consequence of PLO actions and Israeli reprisals was bound to expose Syrian-PLO relations to new, and far greater, tests.

B. CIVIL WAR IN LEBANON, 1975-1976

The civil war in Lebanon impaled both Syria and the PLO on the horns of excruciating dilemmas. From the Syrian point of view, it was essential to restore stability in Lebanon under conditions that would ensure the Ba'athist regime's ability to steer, shape and direct the course of Lebanese politics. Domestically, the Assad regime could be severely shaken by a failure to contain the crisis in Lebanon. Syria could not tolerate an assertive, independent Lebanon that was capable of playing balance-of-power politics in the arena of inter-Arab relations in a manner which would be detrimental to the Syrian regional position. On the other hand, Syria did not want to countenance the complete disintegration of Lebanon and its partition into separate entities, each of whom would turn either to Israel and/or to Syria itself for protection. Nor did Syria wish to become so deeply involved in the Lebanese imbroglio that it would have to maintain a large garrison in Lebanon on a permanent basis. Such an outcome would sap Syria's military strength and demoralize its troops, and it might even send ethnic/religious shock waves through the Syrian body politic. Syria's ultimate aim

in the civil war, therefore, was a restoration of the status quo - ante bellum.

The PLO's dilemma was quite different. The organization's position in Lebanon had been fairly convenient. The City of Beirut, with its vast infrastructure, extensive media and attractive comforts, offered an ideal locus for the PLO's headquarters; Lebanon's hilly and populated south gave the PLO an ideal terrain for operations against Israel. Last, but certainly far from least, the weakness of the Lebanese polity enabled the PLO to possess a freedom of action the likes of which it had never enjoyed anywhere in the Arab World. If, however, Lebanon were to come under the determination of the Phalangists, who had extensive links with Israel, the PLO's freedom would be severely curtailed.

In order to prevent a Phalangist victory, a PLO alignment with the Lebanese left was essential, and, indeed, some of the more radical elements in the PLO were eager to embrace such an alliance. Somewhat superficially, they assumed that it could overcome the Phalangists, effect a complete reshuffle of Lebanon's domestic constitution and, thereafter, turn Lebanon into a radical state, free of the ambiguities towards the Palestinian cause with which traditional Lebanon had been saddled. The Fatah leadership, though, seems to have been far less eager to take part in such a radical experiment. But at the time it feared that a victory for Lebanon's anti-status quo might face the PLO with greater difficulties than

the prevailing order had ever posed. Fatah's leaders were fully aware of Syria's opposition to a major change in Lebanon's internal complexion.

Both the Syrians and the leadership of Fatah entertained a hidden temptation to exploit the deterioration to their advantage. Both preferred the pre-civil war status quo. But the course of the civil war in Lebanon was from the outset beyond the control of either the Syrians or Fatah. The sources of the conflict were ingrained in the complexity of the Lebanese system per se. The forces which launched the civil war and kept it going during the first ten months were mainly Lebanese. At first, both Syria and the PLO were confined to the role of keen, but essentially passive, spectators. When this changed, it was not due to either a Palestinian or a Syrian initiative. Rather, a new twist in the war - specifically, the growing prospect of a Christian victory - prompted the PLO to intervene. Once it did, so the Syrian calculus was altered, and Syria, too, was impelled to become directly involved.

The PLO's intervention was inspired by a desire to prevent the elimination of a favorable status quo - so was Syria's intervention. But by so doing, Syria and Fatah suddenly found themselves in conflict. According to Fatah, Syria made extensive use of the PLO's own cause while actually suppressing Fatah, the PLO's most important constituent organization.

Syria's conflict with the PLO in the Lebanese civil war had its origins in an act of cooperation between them. From January 4-18, 1976, Christian forces succeeded in laying siege on a number of Palestinian and Muslim areas in and around Beirut. The PLO and the (leftist) Lebanese National Movement retaliated by attacking the Christian cities of Damour and Jiyeh. In turn, the Lebanese air force was ordered to strike the leftist. The Palestinians and their Lebanese allies turned to Syria for help. Concerned with avoiding Israeli intervention, but determined to halt the deterioration, Syria deployed in the Bekaa Valley the Yarmuk Brigade of the Palestine Liberation Army, formally a constituent part of the PLO but in practice a Syrian army unit.

Syria then proceeded to mediate among Lebanon's warring parties with a view to restoring order on the basis of a number of moderate changes in the Lebanese National Pact. The Muslims, and especially Kamal Jumblatt's Druzes, were not satisfied with Syria's proposals and sought to force Syria to press for more extensive changes. To achieve their aims, they renewed hostilities and even attacked the presidential palace in Baabdeh, the residence of Sulayman Faranjiyyah, the Syrian supported president of Lebanon.

This challenge to Syria faced the PLO with a difficult choice. Should it join the National Movement and risk a breach with Syria or should it side with Syria and risk its alliance with Lebanon's National Movement? Sensing the PLO's

dilemma, Assad summoned Yassir Arafat to Damascus on April 15, 1976 in an attempt to prevail upon him to side with Syria. An agreement was reached, but it proved to be short lived. On May 8, 1976, Syria succeeded in ensuring the election of Ilyas Sarkis to the presidency of Lebanon. The move was openly defied by the National Movement. Under pressure from the PFLP and the PDFLP, and probably assuming that even a 'friendly' Syria would undercut his organization's independence and freedom of action in Lebanon, Arafat drifted towards an alliance with Jumblatt, the leader of the National Movement.

Arafat's move was a virtual act of rebellion and exposed Assad to a great deal of criticism at home. Deciding to increase Syria's involvement in Lebanon, Assad first ordered Zuheir Mohsen's al-Saika, ostensibly a part of the PLO, to join PLA units in a campaign against the Lebanese National Movement, Fatah, the PFLP and the PDFLP. When this action failed to quell the resistance, Assad, with tacit Israeli and American acquiescence, finally ordered (on June 1, 1976) regular Syrian army units to intervene in the fighting. The die was cast; Syria was determined to force the PLO and its Lebanese allies to accept a Pax Syriana in Lebanon.

The Syrian offensive proved surprisingly sluggish. Nevertheless, by September 30, 1976, the PLO seemed to the Syrians to have been sufficiently bruised to be amenable to fruitful negotiations. Assad ordered a halt to the Syrian attacks and

attempted once again to talk the PLO into a more acquiescent position. Arafat and his colleagues were, however, slow in responding to the Syrian call for a cease-fire. Syria, therefore, launched another offensive on October 12. It was so devastating that this time the PLO had no alternative but to yield. On October 16, 1976, President Assad of Syria and Sadat of Egypt (the latter in fact representing Fatah) met in Riyaadh. A formula for a settlement in Lebanon was worked out and subsequently confirmed in an Arab summit in Cairo on October 25. It basically conferred on the Syrian force in Lebanon a peace-keeping mission. The PLO's (and the Lebanese) challenge to Syria thus came to a brutal end.

C. RECONCILIATION, WAR AND A RENEWED RIFT, 1977

Following the Riyadh and Cairo conferences, Syria and the PLO gradually moved towards rapprochement. The reasons for seeking accommodation were: in the first place, Syria had not abandoned its self-ordained role as guardian of the Palestinian revolution. If anything, the open conflict with the PLO had damaged Syria's position in this regard, and Syria felt impelled to redress its tarnished image.

Second, both Syria and the PLO had to seek ways and means of offsetting the potential effects of the visibly growing cooperation between Israel and the Phalangists.

Third, and perhaps most important, Sadat's peace initiative of November, 1977 inevitably drew the PLO and Syria

together again. For both, that initiative was a momentous challenge, militarily, ideologically, and politically. It implied that Israel would be far more capable of affecting the situation vis-a-vis Syria in the Golan Heights and vis-a-vis the PLO in Lebanon. The implication was that militarily, too, Syria and the PLO should again close ranks.

After Sadat's peace initiative, the PLO and Syria moved fast towards a degree of cooperation that superseded anything achieved in this respect previously. This trend was reinforced under the impact of the Israeli invasion of South Lebanon in March, 1978 (Operation Litani). Following that Israeli operation, the PLO hastened to overhaul its entire deployment in the south of Lebanon. It was in urgent need of training facilities, of far heavier equipment and of Soviet assistance. Syria was both able and willing to satisfy all three needs; indeed, like the PLO, the Syrians increasingly anticipated a far greater Israeli military incursion in the (then) foreseeable future. Thus they had an added incentive for helping the PLO in its own attempts to prepare for the apparently inevitable showdown.

The renewed alliance had clear limits, of which both parties were fully aware. For one thing, the PLO had been engaged since 1974 in internal debate concerning its fundamental disposition. Arafat and some of his associates in Fatah apparently favored a gradual, and cautious, opening to the West, which while avoiding a clear-cut recognition of

which while avoiding a clear-cut recognition of Israel, would nevertheless qualify the PLO as a legitimate participant in an American-Sponsored peace process. Syria was not at all enamored of this idea. Syria was not ready for a grand compromise with Israel. Hence, Arafat's viewed campaign was essentially unacceptable to the Syrians, because if Arafat accepted the notion of a mini-state in the West Bank, the Syrian dream of the Greater Syria ideal would be dealt a severe, indeed fatal, blow.

It was, therefore, essential from the Syrian point of view to make sure that Arafat's campaign inside the PLO for a reorientation of the organization's posture would fail. To achieve this goal, Syria relied on its supporters inside the PLO framework to slow down the shift in the organization's position. Assad's policy proved fairly successful. President Carter's attempts to bring the PLO to accept indirectly the essence of UN Resolution 242 were aborted. Sadat's subsequent attempt to marshal support on the West Bank for the autonomy scheme born at Camp David was foiled.

The second major limit to the Syrian-PLO rapprochement from 1977-82 was far more strategic than political or ideological. During Operation Litani (March, 1978), Syrian forces in Lebanon had remained totally inactive. Israel and Syria were determined to avoid war with each other. Syria's inaction in support of the PLO was conspicuous. The PLO, therefore, had to assume that Syrian devotion to the Palestinian

cause notwithstanding, the Ba'athist republic would not risk its national interest for the sake of the PLO. And when Israel invaded Lebanon on June 5, 1982, this PLO perception of the Syrian position was doubly reinforced. Syrian forces left the PLO to their own devices. Even when they came under heavy Israeli attack, the Syrian contingents in Beirut and in the Bekaa Valley reacted rather passively.

In the wake of the Israeli invasion, some 50 percent of the PLO's troops departed from Beirut late in August, 1982 to Tunisia, Algeria and the PDRY. The rest retreated to the Syrian-held areas of east and north Lebanon and attempted to re-establish themselves there as an autonomous force. The obvious consequence of this latter act was a head-on collision with Syria. The Syrians instigated the so-called Abu Mussa rebellion, a challenge to Arafat's leadership led by Syrian loyalists in the PLO. The Abu Mussa following was, of course, negligible. But it posed a major threat to Fatah because wherever it could not force itself on the latter, it could still count on solid backing by al-Saika, by PLA units and above all, by regular Syrian forces. By 1983, Fatah was cornered in Tripoli, from which it was eventually evacuated by sea. Thus, the combined effect of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and Syria's later actions against Fatah ejected the

PLO from its last remaining foothold in the vicinity of Israel.⁸⁶

In the wake of that disastrous evacuation, the PLO's fighters started to infiltrate back into the Palestinian refugee camps in Beirut. Syria's response to this infiltration was the encouragement of Amal Shiite militiamen to attack the aforementioned camps in what was then called the "War of the Camps". When Amal militiamen failed in their siege of the Camps, the Syrians asked the Druze, the pro-Iranian Shi'ite groups, the Syrian National Socialist Party (SNSP) and the Lebanese Communist Party (LCP) to attack the Camps, on the grounds that Arafat had sent his armed supporters back there.

All these groups refused, and the anti-Arafat Palestinian organizations in Lebanon and Syria openly denounced the attacks. These Palestinian groups have, as a result, been virtually disarmed for their disobedience; the Druze and pro-Iranian Shiites were given a stern warning; the SNSP has been smashed from the inside; and the LCP has been forced to dissolve its military wing.⁸⁷

⁸⁶This section (Syria and the PLO) is quoted from Moshe Maoz and Avner Yaniv, "On Short Leash: Syria and the PLO," in Syria under Assad, edited by Moshe Maoz and Avner Yaniv, St. Martin Press, New York, 1986, pp 191-203.

⁸⁷The Middle East, Section: Monitor, Assad's Secret War, edited by Judith Perera, August, 1985, p. 18.

At considerable cost of lives, Arafat regained a foothold in Lebanon during the first months of 1987 through the bloody war of the Camps and skillful diplomacy.⁸⁸

After more than two decades of turbulent relations, Syria and the PLO seem to be facing a critical moment of truth. If Arafat yields and accepts the limits imposed by the Syrian position, the entire edifice he has labored to build will crumble into little more than a Syrian front. If, on the other hand, he maintains the challenge to Syria's hegemony on the Palestine issue, in itself one aspect of Syria's struggle for regional preponderance, he and his followers may face a mortal risk.

⁸⁸The Middle East, Section: Monitor, Syria Loses its Grip in Lebanon, edited by Judieth Perera, March, 1987, p. 22.

XIV. SYRIA AND IRAQ

Relations between Iraq and Syria are among the most perplexing in the Middle East. Both countries came into existence as a result of the same circumstances; and although Iraq became a British Mandate and Syria a French Mandate, at least insofar as the capitals Baghdad or Damascus are involved, their individual distinctiveness was for decades more a matter of differences between their respective patrons than of real distinction between societies. Hence, once the British and the French each departed from the scene, it could have been expected that Iraq and Syria would rapidly draw together again and ultimately become what they had previously been, namely, two provinces of the same political entity. This, however, never occurred. In fact, with the passage of time, their differentiation both from each other and from the rest of their regional environment rapidly sharpened, often resulting in dissension that bordered on hostility.

In theory, the ascendancy in the 1960s of Ba'athist regimes in both Baghdad and Damascus should have arrested any process of progressive estrangement. In practice, the ideological similarity not only failed to generate rapprochement, but indeed added yet another source of friction.

Syrian-Iraqi relations were not always characterized by dissection and friction. If anything, the hallmark of these relations was a sharp fluctuation between cooperation and

conflict. Between July, 1968, when the Ba'athist regime gained ascendancy in Baghdad, and the early 1970s, relations between Ba'athist Baghdad and Ba'athist Damascus oscillated, sometimes from month to month, between bitter hostility and close cooperation on the political and military levels. On the economic level, on the other hand, cooperation continued throughout this period. The political-military fluctuations resulted from a deep conflict between both countries' Ba'athist ideological commitment to Arab unity and to the liberation of Palestine, which called for close military cooperation, and the hostility and mistrust that often develop between competing offshoots of the same movement. Since 1973, and more in evidence since 1975, the rift between these neighboring Ba'athist regimes progressively widened, until it became almost unbridgeable. Anwar Sadat's peace initiative brought the two rivals together for a brief period; but their uncompromising rivalry soon threw them apart again. The rift was so intense that even their economic relations increasingly deteriorated, although it involved a substantial loss for both sides.

What were the most prominent causes and the most significant consequences of the fluctuating relationship? Briefly, the answer seems to be as follows: There were many reasons for the growing estrangement of the two countries. One factor was the development of conflicting interests regarding major economic issues like oil and water. Another was

Iraq's growing involvement in its dispute with Iran over the Shatt al-Arab and other border areas, which necessitated a growing military concentration in the east and a consequent withdrawing of Iraqi troops from Jordan and Syria, in other words, a certain detachment from Syrian-Iraqi cooperation over the Palestinian issue. The emergency of a new young Ba'ath leadership, led by Saddam Hussein in Iraq, widened the gap between the two countries. Remaining faithful, at least in the long run, to the Ba'athist pledge to Arab unity, the new leaders believed that the rule of their own branch of the party in Baghdad should take priority. Intimate relations with Damascus were regarded as too risky because of the danger that they would lead to a pro-Syrian change of regime. Rap-prochement and eventually unity with Syria would have to wait until the Assad administration was replaced by a true Ba'athist regime; that is, one which was a mirror image of the ruling Ba'ath in Baghdad.

A. THE BA'ATH PARTY PRIOR TO 1968

The "Arab Ba'ath Party" was officially born in Syria on April 7, 1947, the day its first congress was convened. The most prominent among the founders of the new party, which adopted a "constitution" at this gathering, were Michel Aflag, a Syrian born Greek Orthodox, and Salah al-Din al-Bitar, a Syrian Sunni. A few years later, the fledgling Ba'ath party united with a party led by the Hama-born Akram Haurani, and

from then on, it was called "the Arab Ba'ath Socialist Party". Its three most important ideals were, in order of importance, total Arab unity, liberation and socialism. By the early 1950s, the party had branches in Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq. In 1958, it was one of the major moving forces behind the Syrian-Egyptian unity that culminated in the UAR. Disillusionment, however, soon set in. Gamal Abd al-Nasser ignored the party and tried to push Ba'athist leaders to the fringe of political life in the united state. Thus the party did not actively oppose Syria's secession from the two-state union in September, 1961. Thereafter, a split developed inside the party when a young generation, consisting mostly of army officers, challenged the old guard. In February, 1963, the Ba'ath Party came to power in Baghdad, and in March that year, it took over in Damascus.

In both countries, the rift between the two factions became more and more evident. In Iraq, a left wing, led by the regime's strong man Ali al-Sadi, competed with a right wing, led by Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr. In November 1963, the Iraqi Ba'ath were ousted from power by General Abd al-Salam Arif, who had served until then as the country's figurehead president.

The Ba'athist split in Syria involved leftist army officers and civilian intellectuals, on one side, and Aflag's and Bitar's veterans, on the other side. The rift widened between 1963 and 1966. During this period, Bakr's right wing, now

out of power in Iraq, aligned itself with the ruling Aflag group in Syria. At the same time, there was growing estrangement between Bakr and the Syrian "left" led by two colonels, Salah Jedid and Hafez al-Assad. On February 23, 1966, the Syrian leftist officers ousted Aflag's faction from power. The Aflag-led Ba'ath Party thus found itself out of power in both Syria and Iraq and from time to time, even suffered persecution at the hands of the respective regimes in each country.

In July, 1968, Bakr's faction of the Ba'ath took over in Iraq. Ideologically, it was committed to the paramountcy of the civilian party mainly as a reaction to what was seen as the evils of military rule in Ba'athist Syria, from which the Iraqis wanted to disassociate themselves. Iraq and Syria now found themselves ruled by two mutually antagonistic elites, each claiming to be the sole representative of the true Ba'ath Party.

B. OIL ROYALTIES AND PIPELINE POLICY

The upheavals described above, which resulted in the rise of Assad in Syria and Bakr in Iraq, inevitably led to a great deal of friction between the two Ba'athist regimes. The Iraqis rebuked the February, 1966 coup in Syria and offered assistance to leaders and supporters of the Aflag faction in Syria and subsequently (during 1968-70) seemed more supportive of Assad than of his Alawi rival, Salah Jedid. The Syrians,

for their part responded fiercely, denouncing Iraq's position on a variety of issues.

Nonetheless, from 1968-70, the two regimes also acknowledged their great amount of interdependence and their criticism of each other, notwithstanding, collaborated in a number of important areas. Cooperation was particularly marked in three spheres of activity: the transport of Iraqi oil exports through Syria to Mediterranean ports, the commitment to the radicalization and unification of the Arab World and the war against Israel. The consequence was a marked ambivalence in their relations with signs of cooperation and of conflict alternating in rapid succession.

With the passage of time, however, the elements of conflict gradually assumed greater importance. The first fundamental issue to deepen the friction centered on the sensitive issue of oil. On June 1, 1972, Iraq nationalized the property of the Iraqi Petroleum Company, which in the main, had previously belonged to British, Dutch, French and American companies.

As a result of its act of nationalization, Iraq ran into economic difficulties stemming from an inability to market all its oil. Syria, meanwhile, who had also nationalized IPC property on its own soil, then dealt a severe blow by demanding that Iraq pay nearly double the fee for the transit of oil through Syrian territory. Discussions on the matter lasted until January, 1973, when an agreement was reached that met

almost all of the Syrian demands. Iraq, with no other outlet for its Kirkuk oil and faced with a Syrian threat to shutdown the pipeline, had little choice but to yield to Syrian pressure.

Iraqi frustration over this agreement made Iraq alter its attitude towards cooperation with Syria. The first sign of this change was the agreement between Iraq and Turkey on May 1, 1973 for the construction of a 40-inch pipeline, having an initial capacity of 25 million tons a year, from Kirkuk to Dortyol. A leader in Al-Thawra, the Iraqi Ba'ath Party daily, praised the "farsightedness" of the Iraqi leadership for its "innovative methods" that were designed to safeguard a number of alternative outlets to get the nationalized Iraqi oil to World markets. In more specific terms, the newspaper publicized the fact that, in addition to the proposed Iraqi-Turkish pipeline, Iraq had also started building a "strategic pipeline" from Haditha to the Gulf as well as a deep-water harbor there that would serve as a major oil terminal. This meant that Iraq was planning sufficient pipeline capacity to export all its oil production without any dependence on Syria. It was hardly surprising that Syria reacted with ferocious accusation that Iraq was betraying the Arab cause by relying on a non-Arab neighbor.

Iraqi resolve was not shaken. On December 27, 1975, the strategic line was opened. It could deliver 48 million tons yearly from Kirkuk through Haditha to the Gulf. In April,

1976, Iraq stopped the flow of oil through Syria altogether and diverted oil from Kirkuk, through the strategic line to the Gulf. In January, 1977, the Iraqi-Turkish pipeline was officially opened in the district of Tamim in an impressive ceremony.

Iraq's new strategy created an unprecedented situation. The country was now more and more dependent on close cooperation with Turkey, as well as with Iran, with whom Iraq had signed an agreement in March, 1975 that ended the dispute over the Shatt al-Arab. Both countries were non-Arab, both were close allies of the United States and both had overt diplomatic relations with Israel.

From January, 1977, relations between Iraq and Syria reached a nadir. Syria closed its borders to Iraq stopping through-transit commerce, in retaliation for Iraq's suspending the flow of its oil through the Syrian pipeline, which action caused the two trajectories, that of political and that of economic relations, to converge. The transfer of goods and oil through Syria was resumed during the short thaw, from October, 1978 to July, 1979, that followed the Camp David accord. Thereafter, the pumping of oil was stopped and renewed a few times. However, on April 10, 1982, Syria shut down the pipeline as part of the Irano-Syrian agreement that, among others, compensated Syria for its oil-transit revenue losses. This time, Iraq was in the midst of a bitter war with Iran, and Iraqi outlets on the Gulf were inoperative.

The new situation dictated to Iraq, as it had in 1973, the choice of new long-term allies. This time, in addition to Turkey, there were Jordan and Saudi Arabia, through whose territories Iraq planned pipelines for its oil. This time, however, there may also be a hidden ally, whose cooperation will have to be secured in order for Iraqi oil to reach World markets: the State of Israel.

C. THE OCTOBER 1973 WAR AND ITS AFTERMATH

On October 6, 1973, Syria and Egypt attacked Israel. Apparently, in response to a Syrian request, Iraq started preparations on October 7 to send an expeditionary force. On October 8, Iraqi units started moving on trucks, tank carriers, trains and planes. Iraq sent, according to its own reports, two (of its three) armored divisions and various infantry units amounting to the size of a division - a formidable force, considering the short time that was available. (Iraq had been kept completely in the dark in regard to Egyptian-Syrian preparations.) Despite shortcomings in military coordination with Syria and in general performance, the "Saladin" expeditionary force caught the advancing Israeli armor at a critical moment and forced it to arrest its advance - an act that gives some credibility to the Iraqi claim that they were the ones who saved Damascus. Iraq, though, paid a heavy price for helping out a brotherly country with whom relations were going from bad to worse.

The Iraqi action in the October, 1973 war seemed to have pointed in the direction of renewed military, and even political cooperation with Syria on the Palestinian issue. Political practice immediately following the cease-fire, however, proved that this was not the case, as Iraq was adamant in wanting to avoid not only a long-term involvement on the Golan but also close cooperation with Syria. Alternatively, it may be assumed that were Syria ready to pay the very high price Iraq demanded for such cooperation, the latter would have accepted rapprochement. The price was so high, though, that this was hardly a practical prospect: it was the continuation of the war.

When Syria signed the cease-fire agreement on October 24, 1973, Iraq saw this as a defeatist approach that lost the Golan for the Arabs and, more importantly, caused them to miss an historic opportunity to inflict heavy losses on Israel. Worse still, when it signed the agreement, Syria also accepted UN Security Council Resolution 338, which, in turn, included Resolution 242. Iraq viewed Syria's actions as complete acceptance of a resolution against which it had fought since the Ba'ath came to power in July, 1968. For Iraq, acceptance of the resolution meant the embryo of a recognition of Israel - and the Iraqi army was immediately called back home.

Between the end of 1973 and the Camp David meeting of 1978, the Iraqi condition for cooperation with Syria was that Syria should withdraw its acceptance of UN Resolutions 338

and 242. Even though Iraqi did not call for the resumption of an all-out war, its demand that Syria annul a very important international obligation was unacceptable to Syria and, as such, barred the way to any meaningful cooperation.

D. THE ERA OF TOTAL ALIENATION, 1975-1978

Between the October war and the Camp David accord, which pushed Iraq and Syria into each other's arms, four major events affected their bilateral relations. The first of these was a confrontation between March and August, 1975 over the allocation of the Euphrates River waters. The second was the disengagement agreement between Egypt and Israel, which forced Iraq, for the first time since the war, to rethink its relations with Syria. The third event was Syrian involvement in Lebanon. The fourth was Sadat's visit to Jerusalem, which again compelled Iraq to review attitudes towards Syria.

In the spring of 1975, after two years of drought in a row, and the blockage of water by Syria and Turkey, the level of Euphrates water in Southern Iraq decreased sharply. As a result, Iraqi peasants in the lower Euphrates basin suffered greatly, and many crops were lost. This resulted in an unprecedented Iraqi-Syrian confrontation that turned already sour relations into those of coherent hostility.

The escalation of the Syrian-Iraqi rivalry following the Euphrates crisis was reflected in Iraq's attitude towards Damascus in the wake of the second disengagement agreement

between Egypt and Israel in September, 1975. A communique issued by the pan-Arab Leadership of the Ba'ath Party criticized Sadat in no uncertain terms. The Egyptian leader, however, was given credit for his frankness, having often admitted being in favor of a peaceful settlement with Israel.

Syria's Assad, on the other hand, was accorded no such redeeming feature. As the Leadership saw it, he was following Sadat's footsteps, albeit at some distance; whatever Sadat did today, Assad would do within a few months. Assad and the Arab reactionaries, it was charged, were using Sadat as a 'minesweeper': once he had cleared the road for them, they would move along it unharmed.

The pan-Arab Leadership communique heralded a period of constant crisis between Syria and Iraq, on both the political and, for the first time since 1968, the economic level. In 1976, Iraq tried to align itself with Egypt (and a few other Arab countries) against Syrian involvement in Lebanon. Iraq was disappointed at the Cairo summit of October 25, 1976, at which Egypt and Saudi Arabia came to an agreement with Syria over Lebanon, according to which the Syrian army could remain there as the bulk of an Arab security or deterrent force.

After Sadat's historic trip to Jerusalem in November, 1977, the Iraqi media once again turned on Syria, even more viciously than they did against Sadat. At the summit meeting of radical states and organizations (Syria, Iraq, Algeria, South Yemen and the PLO) in Tripoli (Libya) on December 2,

1977, Iraq made it clear that only a change in Syria's commitment to the Resolutions 242 and 338 could lead to any Iraqi cooperation with the Syrians. In addition, Iraq demanded that Syria allow the PLO complete freedom of action through the Syrian border into Israel, that the Syrians withdraw from Lebanon, and that Damascus make a clear-cut commitment to the total liberation of Palestine, not just (allegedly) to the Golan alone. Assad flatly refused the Iraqi demands, and Iraq withdrew from the summit, remaining completely aloof from any joint action by the radical Arab states against Sadat's Egypt because of their refusal to boycott Syria.

E. TO UNITY-STEPS AND BACK, 1978

The shift from bitter confrontation to close cooperation was abrupt. Immediately following the Camp David conference, the Iraqi Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) sent out a communique in the old style, that by implication, denouncing Syria more than it did Egypt. Yet, in October, 1978, the RCC issued a new statement, which appeared in the Iraqi dailies, that opened the gate to Arab cooperation against Sadat without posing any conditions for Iraqi-Syrian cooperation. What had made Baghdad change its mind? The two documents that heralded the change of policy, the communique of the RCC and, a day later, that of the pan-Arab Leadership, explained that Iraq was worried about the defeatist atmosphere in the Arab World and had decided to make an effort to halt the spreading sense

of desolation. Iraqi sources implied that Baghdad now expected to assume the leadership of the Arab World. This meant that Damascus was expected to recognize Baghdad seniority.

As it then appeared to the eye, Iraq's hopes were not frustrated. Following an exchange of messages on October 25 and 26, 1978, it was President Assad, accompanied by a most senior delegation, who came to Baghdad to discuss unity and in November, Baghdad became the scene of an Arab summit meeting that created a united Arab front against Sadat's Egypt.

In terms of Iraqi-Syrian relations, the unity talks produced a Covenant of Joint Pan-Arab Action, which stressed "determination to endeavor seriously...to achieve the strongest form of unitary relations." A supreme political committee under Assad and Bakr was established, along with a host of subcommittees to "undertake the supervision of all bilateral relations...and achieve the cooperation and integrity...towards unionist objectives."

The two countries seemed, however, to be approaching the issue of unity with the greatest of care. The most impressive step was in the area of economic relations, which were returned to normal: the borders were reopened, transportation ties were resumed, and oil started flowing once again from the Kirkuk fields to Banias. On the cultural level, some work was done to unify the curricula of schools and universities. There was, on the political level, an attempt to unify foreign

ministries and to coordinate economic planning. Most of these activities, however, remained in an embryonic phase; the two sides seemed to be in no hurry to complete them.

There is some evidence that Bakr may have been more inclined toward some kind of federation with Syria than was Saddam Hussein. If so, it was eventually Hussein's views which prevailed, and six months later, in mid-July, 1979, Saddam Hussein replaced Bakr as President, Chairman of the RCC and Secretary General of the Regional Leadership of the party in Iraq (RL).

On July 30, 1979, Iraqi media announced the exposure of a could-be coup d'etat against Hussein that had been planned in connection with a "foreign country whose name the Leadership sees that pan-Arab interests require not to mention now". Upon subsequent hints that it was the Damascus regime which had tried to topple the new government in Baghdad, senior Syrian officials went to Baghdad to deny any connection between Syria and the Iraqi plotters, and to try to convince Iraq to refrain from a breach. This effort failed and unity was over.

What made the unity attempt collapse? Iraqi sources give a variety of reasons, some of which are credible: disagreements over the attitude towards the Khomeini regime in Tehran, over the exact form of the future union, and over military cooperation. Most important, however, was the implied admission that appeared in the Resolutions of the Ninth Regional

Congress of the party that, if Iraq and Syria united, the Iraqi leadership expected to be recognized as the senior partner in any fully fledged union. Since Syria turned down this offer, Iraq's enthusiasm for the proposed partnership was greatly reduced. The hint was yet another demonstration of the new line that not only placed local interests very high on the regime's scale of priorities, a policy that was practiced by many Arab governments, but also openly admitted and sought to legitimize it as part of a new emphasis on the Iraqi entity. The Iraqi leadership considered the well being of Ba'athist rule in Baghdad more important than union with Syria.

On August 18, 1980, the heads of Arab diplomatic missions in Baghdad were summoned to witness the removal of "large amounts of explosives, arms and poisonous materials from Syrian Embassy premises". Syria was accused of planning "to carry out massacres, acts of sabotage and killings", and the staff of the Syrian Embassy was told to evacuate the country within 48 hours. Syria, for its part, denied the charges, claiming that the supposed evidence had been planted by Iraqi agents. In retaliation, Damascus expelled the Iraqi ambassador and his 19-man staff.

Relations never recovered, and, in fact, deteriorated steadily. April, 1982 saw the nadir. On April 8, Syria closed its border with Iraq allegedly to prevent the infiltration of saboteurs and weapons from Iraq in support of the

Muslim Brotherhood's underground and other Iraqi-sponsored movements inside Syria. Finally, on April 18, Syria broke off diplomatic relations with Iraq, and Walid Hamadun, a deputy premier, promised to help the Iraqi people in toppling the regime in Baghdad. Syria and Iraq had now completed a 20-year process of progressive estrangement.

The complementary elements of this disassociation were not missing. Since the Baghdad summit of November, 1978, Iraqi-Jordanian relations had been improving steadily. A few weeks after the onset of the war with Iran, Iraq renewed ties with Egypt. These were, to begin with, military relations; the worse off Iraq became militarily, the closer these relations became. Thus, for example, in mid-1982, it was reported that Egypt was selling Iraq large quantities of arms and ammunitions (on the other front, Syria is considered a reliable source of arms, ammunitions and missiles to the Iranians), that Egyptians living in Iraq were free to join the Iraqi army and that Egyptian ex-servicemen could enlist on a private basis. In late 1982, there were reports that the Egyptian labor force in Iraq amounted to more than one million. Such reports indicate close ties and also interdependence.

This Egyptian connection represented, as it did with Jordan and Saudi Arabia, the near-completion of the process of Iraq's estrangement from Syria. This, in its own turn, was part of a wider change in national priorities, introduced

by Saddam Hussein and his associates gradually since the mid-1970s. It involved, among other aspects, a reduced commitment to immediate and, even more so, amalgamative Arab unity; a new balance in relations with East and West; and, at least on the face of it, a somewhat less hostile attitude towards peaceful negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians.

In 1986, King Hussein of Jordan tried to mediate between Syria and Iraq but his attempt failed.⁸⁹ In April 26, 1987, King Hussein and Sauda Arabia's Crown Prince Abdullah secured a summit meeting between Hafez Assad of Syria and Saddam Hussein of Iraq at a desert air base in northeast Jordan. Although the Iraqi and Syrian leaders signed a preliminary accord to crack down on dissident groups in their countries that they have in the past supported, they failed to achieve a rapprochement. Apparently, the obstacles before them remained formidable.⁹⁰

As for the future of Iraqi-Syrian relations, there is reason to believe that under their present leaderships, the two countries will continue to bear the hallmark of mistrust. This does not necessarily mean, however, complete paralysis.

⁸⁹The Middle East, Section: Monitor, Iraq and Syria; a Thaw?, edited by Judith Perera, July, 1986, p. 7.

⁹⁰Associated Press, Section: International News, Syria and Iraq, edited by Ed Blanche, Nicosia, Cyprus (AP) June 15, 1987.

Iraq is extremely anxious to return to the pattern of bilateral relations that prevailed between the two between 1973 and 1976, that is, to political hostility accompanied, notwithstanding, by almost undisturbed economic cooperation, at least insofar as Iraqi oil exports were concerned. Syria, for its part, insists on a thorough rapprochement and even demands to establish federal unity, possibly with Assad at its head. In view of its obvious inferiority under the present war circumstances, Iraq cannot accept such a proposition, which seems to the Baghdad-based Ba'ath to be a prescription for Syrian infiltration and domination. Until either side changes its position, rapprochement is not feasible.

Because of the fact that, in Baghdad, federation is seen as tantamount to annihilation, any change in the present deadlock depends mainly on greater Syrian flexibility. In view of the growing discord between Syria and Iran, such a possibility cannot be counted out.⁹¹

⁹¹This Section (Syria and Iraq) is quoted from Amazia Baram, "Ideology and Power Politics in Syrian-Iraqi Relations, 1968-1984, in Syria under Assad, edited by Moshe Maoz and Avner Yaniv, St. Martin Press, New York, 1986, pp 125-139.

XV. SYRIA AND KHOMEINI'S IRAN

The Irano-Syrian alliance has remained intact for nearly a decade in spite of very obvious discrepancies between the two countries: Syria is a socialist republic; Iran is a radical Islamic theocracy. Syria is strongly supported by Moscow; Iran is in conflict with the Soviet Union. Syria, by its own claims, is the most devout bearer of pan-Arabism; Iran opposes the very concept of a nation-state and is at odds with most of the Arab World. Syria is motivated by a powerful drive for social, economic and cultural modernization; Iran, by contrast, has revived the social, economic, legal and cultural patterns of pre-modern periods. Nevertheless, all signs indicate that both parties have been content with their alliance policies.

Nor has the impact of their relationship on the Middle East been negligible: (1) Syria's decision in early April, 1982 to plug the pipeline transiting its territory from Iraq, and thereby prevent Iraq's oil from reaching the Mediterranean, caused a severe blow to Iraq in its war with Iran, helping to tilt the balance in the latter's favor. (2) Syria's support of Iran at a time when Jordan actively supported Iraq contributed, during the early 1980s, to a further deterioration of relations between Damascus and Amman. The outcome has been to limit Jordanian rather than Syrian political maneuverability. Accordingly, the possibility of achieving a

breakthrough in the stagnant Arab-Israeli peace process, although not having been blocked totally, has been diminished.

(3) Arab, and particularly Saudi Arabian, pressure against Syrian support of Iran has been ineffective. The fact that Syria has overcome Saudi pressure has strengthened Syrian prestige and added weight to its role in inter-Arab relations.

(4) Syrian support of Iranian activities within Lebanon has worked against U.S., French and Israeli interests in central and south Lebanon, despite the fact that Washington, Paris and Jerusalem have, each in its own way, recognized Syrian supremacy in Lebanon. Finally, (5) Syria's continued support of Iran, in spite of worsening relations between Moscow and Tehran, has tended to demonstrate Syria's capability of pursuing its regional policies independently of the Soviet Union.

Are Iran's relations with Syria only an opportunistic exploitation of a convenient constellation? Or do these relations reflect a more fundamental convergence of interests? For a better understanding of the workings of Irano-Syrian relations it is necessary to analyze the interests involved on both sides.

A. IRANIAN INTERESTS

1. The Assets of the Alliance

Iran's interest in establishing an alliance with Syria were evident from the very start of Islamic revolutionary rule and became particularly apparent after the outbreak of war

with Iraq in September, 1980. Such an alliance offers five major assets for Iran.

a. Syrian Military Pressure against Iraq

From the very beginning of the Iran-Iraq war, the Iranians have endeavored to bring Syrian military pressure to bear against Iraq and to tie down as many Iraqi troops as possible along the Iraqi-Syrian frontier. The Iranians hoped for Syrian assistance in three different ways: first, the maintenance of an atmosphere of hostility between Damascus and Baghdad necessarily meant that Iraq's border with Syria could not be kept undefended, which would be an invitation to Syrian military pressure. Second, Syrian support for oppositional forces within Iraq, particularly Kurdish resistance groups, could potentially create far-reaching military consequences. Third, Syria could supply Iran with Soviet arms. Even if the Iranian army was equipped with U.S. and European arms, Soviet equipment was important, at least, for training purposes in order to enable a more adequate military response to the Soviet-equipped Iraqi army.

Syria, in fact, offered assistance to the Iranians in all three spheres. More concretely, in April, 1981, Syria made its airfields available for Iranian strikes against Western Iraq. In April, 1982, Syrian planes violated Iraq's airspace, thereby enhancing Iraqi fears of Syrian military action. Syria also enlarged its support of military and other resistance operations for the opposition parties within Iraq.

Finally, unconfirmed reports have indicated that Syria has been supplying Iran with Soviet arms.

b. Syrian Economic Warfare against Iraq

Throughout the war with Iraq, a vital Iranian objective has been to cause the Iraqi economic damage. In a situation in which the Iranian army has not been capable of breaking a stalemate on the battlefield through military means, the strategy of economic warfare has now become most essential. The Iranians did not spare any effort in attempting to convince the Syrians to cut off Iraqi oil deliveries via Syria to the Mediterranean. The direct economic and indirect psychological effect on Iraq of Syria's turning off the taps early in April, 1982 was substantial. Although the exact financial loss of Iraq is difficult to establish, the total capacity of the closed oil pipeline represents a reduction in potential annual income of nearly US \$6 billion.

The closure of the Syrian pipeline created new needs. First, Iraq took immediate steps to expand the capacity of the Iraqi-Turkish pipeline from 650,000 b/d to 1,000,000 b/d. This work, previously carried out by Turkish firms, obliged Iraq to take out a US \$20,000,000 Euroloan. Next, with Saudi help, Iraq started construction of a pipeline to the Saudi Arabian port Yanbu on the Red Sea. This pipeline was scheduled to be completed by 1986 and to cost an estimated US \$2 billion.

Finally, work on another pipeline, to Zerga in Jordan and from there to Aqaba on the Red Sea, has progressed beyond

the planning stage. The necessary capital investments for these alternative lines created heavy difficulties for Iraq at a time when its estimated foreign currency reserves have fallen from US \$36 billion in 1980 to US \$4.5 billion in 1982.

The critical economic and financial burden has forced President Saddam Hussein to introduce a policy of austerity. The Iranians hope that such measures will gradually decrease the loyalty of the Iraqi population to its present regime, and thus contribute to Hussein's fall. The combination of military pressure and economic warfare should, according to (optimistic) Iranian calculations, bring an end to the war, without forcing the Iranian army actually to conquer Iraqi territory.

c. Preventing a Hostile Arab Union against Iran.

Another reason for the importance to the Islamic regime in Tehran of Syrian support is to prevent the formation of a united Arab bloc against Iran. This objective is of ideological value to the Iranian Islamic fundamentalists, but is of even greater political and diplomatic importance. Ideologically, Khomeini and his followers have always looked towards Mecca and Medina as the origin and center of Islam. In his theoretical writings and teachings Khomeini has never made a distinction between Iranian and Arab nationalism; for him, nationalism per se is a negative concept, derived from Western thinking. The political framework that is relevant and legitimate for Khomeini is ummat al-muminin, the

"community of believers", which comprises all Muslims in the World. Because of this religious-political concept, Khomeini has always had pan-Islamic ambitions and repeatedly stressed the need to bridge the gap between Sunni and Shi'ite Islam. The occurrence of a united Arab opposition against Iran could not but undermine Khomeini's credibility at home and underscore the fact that his political ideas are cut off from reality.

Related to the ideological question is the political aspect of Iranian isolation in the face of a united, hostile Arab front. The alliance with Syria greatly helped Iran avoid a total political isolation in the Arab World.

As for its diplomatic aspect, the prevention of hostile Arab unity and the ability of Tehran to play one Arab state against the other is essential to Iran's standing. The alliance with Syria has been a major asset in the achievement of this diplomatic goal.

In November, 1980, shortly after the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war, the conservative Arab powers led by Saudi Arabia and Jordan, arranged an Arab summit conference in Amman. The main aim was to mobilize Arab support for Iraq. The conference, however, was boycotted by Syria, Algeria, Libya, the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen and the PLO. Syria was not strong enough by itself to prevent the convening of the summit conference, but its opposition combined with that of other Arab states turned the meeting into an insignificant event.

In May, 1981, Saudi Arabia succeeded in bringing about the establishment of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which included Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Bahrain and Qatar. The GCC enjoyed the support of Iraq, Jordan and Pakistan and was able to draw upon support from Egypt, Sudan, Morocco and also the United States. One of the Council's declared aims was to coordinate efforts to thwart both internal subversion and external security threats. There was little doubt, though, that the GCC was created mainly to counter the threat of direct or indirect Iranian aggression. In this context, Syria has played from the beginning a major role in neutralizing the anti-Iranian tendencies of the Council. The GCC, for its part, has been extremely careful not to alienate the Syrians. In May, 1982, in the wake of Iranian military victories in April and May of the same year, the Syrians succeeded in preventing the convening of an Arab summit conference against Iran. Going even further, Syria arranged a high-level pro-Iranian meeting in Damascus in January, 1983 that was attended by its own foreign minister as well as those of Iran and Libya. There can be no doubt that all these Syrian moves were well appreciated in Tehran.

d. Securing Iranian Presence and Influence in Lebanon

Obtaining influence and, possibly, control over the Shi'ite community in Lebanon has long been an aim of Khomeini, even before he seized power in Iran in February, 1979. The importance of this community for Khomeini's revolutionary

Islamic fundamentalism stems from a variety of factors. First, there is the personal attachment of Khomeini to Imam Musa al-Sadr, the late leader of the Lebanese Shi'ites, a community of co-religionists that constitutes almost 40 percent of Lebanon's population. Second, the fact that this Shi'ite community is politically, socially and economically weak is thought to increase the intervention capability of the Iranian revolutionary Islamic forces, with the collapse of Lebanon's central government easing Iranian intrigue and intervention. Third, that the Shi'ite population lives mainly in southern Lebanon, adjacent to Israel, offers the opportunity to incite, with little means and costs, the "popular struggle against Zionism", and thus demonstrate Iran's specific contribution to the Arab (and Islamic) struggle against Israel. Despite its importance for Khomeini, however, such a role for Iran among Lebanon's Shi'ite community would be utterly impossible without Syrian consent.

As a result of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in June, 1982, the Iranians at first organized cohorts of volunteers to fight Israel. The Iranians were permitted by the Syrians to establish their headquarters and training center in Ba'albek, in northeastern Lebanon, where they also trained terrorists from both Lebanon and other countries in a combination of suicide techniques and Islamic revolutionary doctrine. The suicidal sabotage acts against the U.S. Marines and French soldiers of the Multinational Force in Beirut in

October, 1983, as well as similar attacks later that year against Israeli troops in Tyre, were reportedly carried out by members of the Iranian Hizb ul-allah (Party of God). Although the political and ideological value of such acts is paramount for the Iranians, they are aware that these activities can only be performed with at least the tacit cooperation of the Syrians.

e. Maintaining another Channel towards Moscow

Iran's alliance with Syria has also worked as an effective instrument for improving relations between Moscow and Tehran. On one hand, Khomeini and his foreign policy aids were determined to eliminate, or at least diminish, any vestiges of Soviet presence and influence in Iran. On the other hand, they wanted to maintain a correct working relationship with Moscow, based on Muhammad Mosaddeq's theory of "negative equilibrium" (movazen-emanfi). Mosaddeq had argued that the United States and the Soviet Union would each tolerate a decrease in their direct influence in Iran as long as the interests of the other superpower were also curbed. It has been a traditional technique to moderate any deterioration in direct relations with Russia by simultaneously maintaining good relations with a third party friendly to the Russians. Nasr ed-Din Shah in the 1870s and more successfully, Reza Shah in the mid and late 1920s each tried to involve Germany as such a third party, to act as a go-between with Russia. This permitted the Iranians to

decrease Soviet influence without creating strong opposition from Moscow.

Khomeini has been employing Syria in a similar function, aiming mainly to keep the Soviet Union from backing Iraq in its war with Iran. In the early stages of the war, this technique worked effectively. Although Soviet interests in Iran were hit with a variety of measures (for instance, stopping Iranian supplies of gas to the Soviet Union and halting almost totally Soviet economic and cultural activities in Iran), Soviet-Iranian relations were actually if indirectly improved through Syria. When Saudi Arabia and other GCC Arab states introduced economic pressures to stop Damascus from continuing its alliance policy with Iran, the Soviet Union intervened by increasing economic assistance to Syria, thereby neutralizing the anti-Iranian Arab pressure.

By 1983, however, the Soviet Union put an end to its lenient policy towards Iran for two main reasons. First, Iranian army victories against Iraq created tangible dangers of destabilization in the region. Second, Iran's purge of the Tudeh communists, which reached its peak in February, 1983 when 8500 Tudeh leaders and activists were imprisoned, convinced the Soviet Union that any real rapprochement between Moscow and Tehran would be impossible. Moscow then ostentatiously provided Baghdad with aid and let it be known that relations with Tehran had markedly deteriorated. Nevertheless, this step had no impact on either Soviet-Syrian or

Syrian-Iranian relations. Syria's role as a potential bridge between Tehran and Moscow, in fact, became even more desirable from the Iranian point of view.

B. THE LIABILITIES OF THE ALLIANCE

In spite of the prevalence of very substantial arguments in favor of an alliance policy towards Syria, such a policy also posed certain liabilities for the Iranians: economic, political and religious-ideological.

1. The Economic Liability

The economic disadvantage of Iran's liaison with Syria can be measured in financial terms. The Irano-Syrian trade agreements of 1982, 1983 and 1984 provide for the free delivery of 1,000,000 tons of Iranian oil to Syria. At a price of US \$28 per barrel, the direct cost to Iran amounts to about US \$196,000,000 annually. Syria, moreover, has reportedly been granted barter conditions and price reductions of US \$3 per barrel, thus costing Iran, on average, a further US \$150,000,000 to US \$200,000,000 annually. Given Iran's economic difficulties as a result of the revolutionary chaos and the war effort, these amounts are not unimportant.

2. The Political Liability

On the political level, the alliance policy towards Syria has created heavy restraints in three different spheres: first, although both the Iranian and Syrian leaderships are unanimous in their common opposition to Saddam

Hussein and his regime, they differ fundamentally on the question of which opposition group in Iraq should be encouraged to take its place. An open struggle broke out between Damascus and Tehran on this issue after the Iranians had announced early in 1982 a four-stage plan for the establishment of a new Islamic regime in Iraq, including a Supreme Islamic Revolutionary Council. The Syrians opposed these plans vigorously. The Jordanian newspaper Al-Dustur reported that, owing to Syrian pressure, the Iranians replaced its designated Chairman of this Council. Although the Iranians have thus restrained their support for Islamic revolutionary groups within Iraq in order to preclude open friction with Syria, the issue represents a major potential source of conflict.

Second, the Iranians would prefer to follow a far more activist and radical policy in Lebanon. Iran's immediate goal of increasing destabilization and radicalization among the Shi'ite community hardly tallies with Syrian interests. Recognizing this, the Iranians have in their actions respected Syrian desires.

A third political disadvantage had to do with Iranian tourists to Syria. When following the signing of the Irano-Syrian trade agreement in March, 1982, the first tourist groups arrived to Syria, they caused some serious clashes. Immediately after their arrival in Damascus, the Iranians, who presumably were revolutionary activists being remunerated

for their services rather than "real" tourists, distributed posters with pictures of Khomeini and attached religious Islamic slogans on the walls of the airport and its surroundings. The Syrian army was kept busy for over a week pulling down the posters, cleaning the walls and repainting them. Many of the Iranians then protested violently against their accommodations, which they thought were situated in red-light districts. These disturbances tended to enhance the sense of isolation among the Iranian revolutionary rank and file, while at the same time this kind of propagandistic eagerness may have created second thoughts among the Syria leadership. In any event, both Iranian and Syrian authorities decreased the number of Iranian tourists visiting Syria.

3. The Religious-ideological Liability

The "tourist" incidents demonstrate the depth of the ideological gap separating Tehran from Damascus. In addition, a historically deeper religious-ideological factor created further potential liabilities for the Iranians.

A major tactic of the Khomeini regime in appealing to the semi-educated and uneducated masses is to revive the memory of the martyrdom of Imam Hussein. On the 10th of Muharram 680, the Imam and his entourage were cruelly murdered in Kerbela (Iraq) by the Umayyad Caliph Yazid, who ruled his empire from Damascus. Hussein martyrdom is recalled by special passion plays and processions performed once a year, but the story is kept alive during the year by repeated

tellings, often several times a week. The plays, processions and stories effectively preach hatred of Sunni Islam. It has been common usage in the past to accuse certain Iranians as well as Arab leaders of being the successors to Yazid, who is represented as the incarnation of evil. Such historical associations create no immediate danger to the Irano-Syrian alliance, but in times of crisis, the permanent negative image of Damascus fostered by Shi'ite tradition may seriously affect the preservation of the alliance.

The foregoing analysis of the assets and liabilities of Iran's alliance policy towards Syria suggests a number of conclusions. From the Iranian point of view, the advantages derived from this alliance have been substantial, especially in military matters, in matters of economic warfare against Iraq, and in matters related to Iran's regional and global policies. Iranian policymakers have been clearly aware of these advantages. At the same time, the Iranians have had to pay both a certain financial price for maintaining the alliance and make necessary political and ideological concessions. For all its ideological fervor, Iranian policy vis-a-vis Syria suggests that ideological considerations are secondary. Management of the alliance from Tehran has been totally pragmatic. It is true that Iranians did try to ascertain how far they could go in following specific ideological and political goals that they knew would not be shared by the Ba'ath regime in Damascus. When, however, the Syrians

wanted to stop such endeavors, the Iranians had no difficulty in restraining themselves for the purpose of promoting friendly relations with Damascus.

C. THE SYRIAN VIEW OF THE ALLIANCE

Syria's motives for establishing and maintaining the alliance with Iran are, in many ways, ambiguous. This ambiguity can best be illustrated by the following facts. Economically, Syria has a major stake in the alliance because of the large quantity of free and discounted oil received from Iran. Moreover, the blocking of the Iraqi oil pipeline has both taught the Iraqis a lesson and potentially increased the economic value of the Syrian pipeline system. In 1976, the Iraqis had arbitrarily stopped the flow of their oil via Syria to the Mediterranean causing Syria a loss in annual transit fees estimated at US \$136,000,000. In February, 1979, Iraq resumed oil transit through Syria, but fixed the fee at US \$0.35 per barrel, compared to US \$0.445 paid before 1976. In addition, the Iraqis pumped only 10,000,000 tons via the Syrian pipeline system during 1979 instead of the average 27,700,000 tons sent annually from 1971-76. Thus, Syria's temporary closure of the pipeline at Iran's behest might, in the future, guarantee both higher transit fees and a steady, maximal supply of oil for the pipeline.

The undoubtedly substantial economic interest in favor of Syria's maintaining the alliance with Iran is, however, offset

by certain contradictory economic factors. Reportedly, the Saudis offered Syria in January, 1983, a one-time payment of US \$2 billion to reopen the pipeline for Iraq; yet the Syrians refused. The longer the Syrians keep their pipeline system closed, though, the less leverage they will have because the Iraqis have been engaged in a search for alternative solutions. Iraq is investing much effort and money in enlarging the pumping capacity of the Iraqi-Turkish pipeline from 650,000 barrels/day to 1,000,000 barrels/day. Together with Saudi Arabia, it is building a pipeline to Yanbu on the Red Sea. Construction, moreover, has also been started on an Iraqi pipeline to Zerga in Jordan and from there to Aqaba on the Red Sea. In other words, Syria's decision to prevent Iraqi oil supplies from reaching the Mediterranean via its territory may well boomerang and render the Syrian pipeline obsolete.

Finally, the Syrians have to realize that the moment Iraq solves its oil transit problem, or perhaps even earlier, their oil supplies from Iran will be vulnerable. Iranian oil must pass through the Straits of Hormuz and the Suez Canal. President Mubarak of Egypt has threatened to stop Iranian oil from passing through the Canal, and tankers in the Straits are at the mercy of the Iraqi planes. It may be concluded, therefore, that Syria's economic stake in an alliance with Iran is, at best, ambiguous.

Nor is the political dimension of the liaison free of contradiction. The Syrians closed their border with Iraq in

April, 1982, only several weeks after the serious disturbances in Hama in which government troops clashed fiercely with opposition groups led by the Muslim Brotherhood. There seems to be little doubt that President Assad was anxious to present himself, and the Ba'ath regime, to his people as a supporter and benefactor of religion. A link with Iran could conceivably legitimize such a posture, enabling Assad to split the religious opposition to his regime.

The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, on the other hand, has historically enjoyed close links with Iraq and opposed Khomeini's brand of Islamic fundamentalism. Other Islamic religious groups with political influence in Syria, moreover, have shown little empathy for Iran. The anti-Iranian bias of Islamic religious sects clearly prevails, too, among non-religious Syrians, for whom the identification with Arab nationalism demands an identification with the Iraqi struggle against Iran. As a matter of fact, Syria's decision to cut off the flow of Iraqi oil to the Mediterranean was followed in April, 1982 by the setting up of the Iraqi-backed "National Alliance for the Liberation of Syria", a coalition of different Syrian opposition groups. It may be concluded that Syria's alliance with Iran has actually had a destabilizing effect in the sphere of internal politics, and any gains have, at best, been marginal.

D. THE IRANIAN IMPACT ON LEBANON

It may be argued that one of Syria's goals in Lebanon was to establish indirect control over the country; for this purpose, Syria employed proxies, such as the PLO, the Druze community, some Sunni factions, the Faranjiyyah faction among the Maronites and the Shi'ite Amal faction. The Iranian presence in Lebanon served the same interest, being particularly useful in that Damascus could use its lever in Tehran to control Iranian activities. There can be little doubt that the tactic of Iranian suicide terrorism has served Syrian interests in Lebanon rather well. The October, 1983 incident against U.S. Marines, French soldiers and Israeli troops, and against the latter in April and August, 1984 contributed to the withdrawal of the U.S. French and Israel from Lebanon, without creating the demand for a Syrian quid pro quo. In addition, Damascus has reason to be pleased about its ability to discipline the Iranian forces.

Nevertheless, the Iranian presence in Lebanon may turn out to be a mixed blessing from the Syrian point of view. First, although Syria may be able to control the Iranians in Lebanon, it cannot necessarily direct the acts of Lebanese Shi-ites. Assad wants wholeheartedly to free the Western and American hostages in Lebanon. The Hezbollah militiamen not only foiled the Syrian attempts but challenged the Syrians boldly. In May, 1986, firefights broke out in Baalbek between Syrian troops and Hezbollah militiamen. The next month, two members

of the Damascus-backed Syrian Social Nationalist Party were kidnapped by Shi-ites associated with Hezbollah; their bullet-riddled bodies were found two days later. Five days of fighting followed around the Bekaa Valley town of Mashgara. In October, when the Syrians arrested two members of the militia in Mashgara, the Shi'ite radicals responded by kidnapping four Syrian soldiers. Not until the Syrian army freed its prisoners were the soldiers returned.⁹² This community is involved in an existential struggle and, under certain circumstances, is ready to turn against Syria. Second, and not unrelated, is

that with the decrease, or possibly elimination, of American, French and Israeli influences over Lebanon, the burden of restoring stability in that country will fall squarely on Syria.

E. THE IRANIAN IMPACT ON SYRIA'S POSITION WITHIN THE ARAB WORLD

Syria has long aimed at playing a leading role within the Arab World. Its prestige and influence within the Arab community have always been important factors in Syrian policymaking. The question, therefore, of whether the alliance with Iran has affected Syria's standing within the Arab World is exceedingly pertinent. An answer is not easy.

On one hand, Syrian amour propre and Syrian prestige have clearly been elevated. In the early stages of the Iran-Iraq war,

⁹²Foreign Affairs, Assad and his Allies, edited by Denise Brown, vol. 66, No. 1, Fall, 1987 pp 69-70.

Syria was not the only state to provide Iran with support. Algeria, Libya, the PDRY and the PLO publicly expressed a similar stand. Moreover, Saudi Arabia and the Arab sheikhdoms had very little reason to desire an Iraqi victory, even though they publicly identified with Iraq. In this situation, Syria succeeded in undermining the Arab summit conference in Amman in November, 1980. As the war went on, Syria repeatedly demonstrated that it was powerful enough to prevent any public condemnation of its alliance policy towards Iran. This was the case at Arab summit meetings held in Fez, Morocco in 1981 and 1982.

In three meetings of the Gulf Cooperation Council, Saudi Arabia and the oil shaikhdoms of the Persian Gulf took pains to avoid attacks on Syria, despite its open defiance of mediation efforts by the GCC in a Syrian dispute with Iraq. Furthermore, late in December, 1982 and in January, 1983, the Syrians publicly rebuffed an attempt by King Fahd of Saudi Arabia to bring about a meeting between Hafez al-Assad, Saddam Hussein and Fahd himself. In an interview given to Al-Majallah, Saddam Hussein had personally welcomed an improvement of relations with Syria. Syria's response was to organize a meeting in Damascus of the Iranian, Libyan and Syrian foreign ministers, who publicly denounced the Iraqis.

There may be no doubt that by his consistent policy in favor of Iran, President Assad gained respect for Syria's willingness to follow steadfastly a policy of its own. As

tangible evidence of this respect, he obtained a variety of offers from different Arab states which tended to boost Syrian prestige. The Saudis offered money. Other Arab states expressed hope that Syria might be the one state capable of mediating between Iraq and Iran. Another plan involved Syria more directly: Syria would reopen its pipelines to Iraq in exchange for Iraq's refraining from using its French Super-Etendards against Iran. Taken altogether, these various proposals added to a general Arab recognition of and support for Syria's special standing with Iran.

In contrast, Syria's policy towards Iraq produced negative repercussions. First, its policies were, at least, partly responsible for a rapprochement between Iraq and Egypt. Syria's closure of its pipeline to Iraqi oil necessarily turned Iraq to seek Egyptian goodwill. Iraq's decision to build pipelines to Yanbu (Saudi Arabia) and Aqaba (Jordan) on the Red Sea tends to create Iraqi dependence on Egypt to permit the flow of Iraqi oil via the Suez Canal to the Mediterranean, and thus in the long term may strengthen Iraq's pro-Egyptian inclinations.

Second, support of Iran has put Syria very much on the defensive in its relationship with all Arab institutions. The convening in May, 1983 of the Third Conference of the Arab Parliamentary Union in Baghdad, the capital of Syria's enemy, constituted a defeat for Syria. Worse was the fact that in August, 1983, Syria was called before an OAPEC tribunal to

defend itself against the implied accusation of treason to the Arab cause.

If all the gains made by Syria from promoting an alliance policy towards Iran were, and still are, ambiguous, something of which Syria cannot be unaware, what then was its true motive for adopting such a policy?

The answer lies in an idea that has become a cornerstone of political thinking in Syria under Assad: Syria can play a leading role in the Arab World and the Middle East as a whole only as long as Egypt and Iraq are neutralized and kept out of the Middle Eastern power game. In the words of a Syrian Ba'athist ideologist, "Syria's historical task is to protect the strategic balance in the Middle East (which has been upset by Egypt's 'defection' from the Arab camp and Iraq's preoccupation with Iran), and Syria is the only capable force willing to do so."

The fall of the Shah and the emergence of an Islamic revolutionary regime in Iran thus presented a timely gift to Syria, for these developments weakened Egypt and threatened Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states. Next, the Iran-Iraq war promised, in case of prolonged fighting, to neutralize Iraq in the inter-Arab power game. Syria would be left in a dominant position. A quick Iraqi victory, on the other hand, would turn Baghdad and Saddam Hussein into the unchallenged leader of the Arab World, and thus undermine Syria's and Assad's ambitions.

The alliance with Iran, then, was a perfect device from the Syrian point of view, particularly as Iraq's power steadily weakened. The alliance policy towards Iran created a geopolitical situation in which Syria was seemingly the only Arab state capable of taking the lead, one way or another. It is this idea and this experience which has motivated Syria to hold onto this policy, despite the extensive degree of incompatibility with a variety of Syrian interests that the alliance with Iran has entailed.

F, CONCLUSION

In analyzing Iranian and Syrian motives for maintaining their present alliance, the following conclusions may be drawn:

1. As long as the Iran-Iraq war goes on, the Iranian motivation to continue its alliance with Damascus will most likely persist.
2. As long as Iran assists Damascus in keeping both Iraq and Egypt from playing a leading role in inter-Arab affairs, Syria will most probably continue its alliance with Iran, at least as long as Assad remains at the helm.
3. The Irano-Syrian alliance has been asymmetrical. The incentives for the Iranians to maintain the alliance were far more powerful than were the incentives for Syria.
4. Both partners to the alliance have so far been successful in keeping ideological discrepancies - which are very

important - from causing any serious friction. As long as the conditions which have brought this alliance prevail, it will endure.

5. It appears that Syria has little reason to fear an Iranian victory in the war against Iraq. Such a development would turn Syria into the only feasible mediator between Iran and the Arab World. It might encourage radicalization, thus putting an end to the peace process with Israel and further isolating Egypt.

6. As long as Iran does not achieve a decisive victory over Iraq, time and the flow of oil are working against the Irano-Syrian alliance. The formation of an Egyptian-Jordanian alliance in support of Iraq may prevent Iranian oil supplies to Syria, but more important, it may create an effective counterbalance against the Irano-Syrian alliance and thus neutralize the benefits of the alliance policy for the Syrians. In the long run, the Irano-Syrian alliance depends on Hafez al-Assad's ability to continue an ingenious balancing act, which at one and the same time has kept Iraq busy along its eastern frontier, blocked Egypt from inter-Arab affairs and neutralized Saudi Arabia, Jordan and the smaller Gulf states, if not paralyzed them out of fear of the Irano-Syrian pincer. Assad may be capable for some time of such Bismarckian diplomacy. It remains doubtful, though, whether

any other Syrian leader would be as successful in playing the same game under such severe constraints.⁹³

⁹³This section (Syria and Khomeini's Iran) is quoted from Yair Hirschfeld, "The Odd Couple: Ba'athist Syria and Khomeini's Iran", in Syria under Assad, edited by Moshe Maoz and Avner Yaniv, St. Martin Press, New York, 1986, pp 105-122.

XVI. THE SYRIAN-TURKISH RELATIONS

A. THE BACKGROUND

Several years following the exchange of direct diplomatic representatives between Turkey and newly-independent Syria in 1946, relations between these two neighboring countries remained markedly chilly. Memories of the recent past seemed to have formed this attitude in no small way: Turks remembered the "treason" of Arab-Syrian nationalist circles during World War I and the "stab in the back" they suffered from the Arab revolt; Syrians remembered the misrule of their Ottoman conquerors and the heavy-handed methods the latter adopted in attempting to suppress the nascent Syrian-Arab nationalist movement. More important, Syrians were unable to forget what seemed to them as the arbitrary transfer of the province of Alexandretta by the French mandatory authorities into the hands of the Turks on the eve of World War II. In the eyes of the Syrians, Alexandretta was the legal property of the Syrian people, and the Turks were nothing but usurpers.

An unexpected but short interlude of improved relations occurred in 1949 following the rise to power in Syria of Colonel Husni al-Za'im, who pledged himself as an avowed enemy of communism in the area and saw for Turkey an important role against Soviet expansionism. Following his overthrow, however, relations between Turkey and Syria deteriorated once again. Syria, for one thing, frowned upon

Turkey's recognition of Israel and newly established relations with the Jewish state. Secondly, Syria resisted the sustained efforts made by Turkey to prompt Arab countries into joining the Western system of alliances. When in early 1955, Faris al-Kuri's government invited Turkish Prime Minister Adnan Menderes for discussion on the matter, public resentment reached such a point that whatever plans existed for Syria's joining with Turkey had to be abandoned. From then on, relations gradually drifted into confrontation. Internal instability and the growing influence in Syria of radical nationalist and leftist elements, its entry into an alliance with Egypt and its acceptance of military and economic aid from the Soviet Union turned Syria, in Turkish eyes, into a real threat to Turkey's southern border, as well as to Western interests in the Middle East. During the upheavals in Jordan in April, 1957, Turkey concentrated troops along the border with Syria as a measure of warning and intimidation. A more serious crisis broke out in August when new concentration of Turkish troops (meant to prevent Syria from strengthening its ties with the Soviet Union) led to partial mobilization in Syria, a Syrian complaint to the United Nations and public warning by the Soviet Union against intervention. Tension subsided only after the gradual withdrawal of the Turkish forces.

Although Turkey welcomed the Egyptian-Syrian union in February, 1958 as a possible means of curbing the Soviet and

communist influences in its southern neighbor, no significant improvement in relations occurred. The United Arab Republic pursued the radical pan-Arab and anti-Western policies that were pursued earlier in both Egypt and Syria, while Turkey continued to see itself in the role of guardian of Western interests in the area.

B. TOWARDS NORMALIZATION AND COOPERATION

Upon the dissolution of the UAR in September, 1961, Turkey was the second state after Jordan to recognize the new regime in Damascus, a step leading to an immediate rupture in Turkey's relations with Egypt. Obviously Turkey hoped, as she had on several occasions in the past, that quick recognition of the new regime would help improve relations with its southern neighbor and that Syria, emerging from an unsuccessful experiment, would be more amenable to Turkish overtures.

Circumstances, however, did not support these expectations. With a shaky parliamentary regime desperately seeking to cling to power and with radical Nasserist and Ba'athist elements still exercising strong influence, Syria held out little hope for a drastic reorientation of its foreign policy. In fact, following the ascendancy of the Ba'ath in March, 1963, there was renewed emphasis on Arab unity, socialism and cooperation with the Soviet bloc. These policies, especially socialist and the pro-Soviet orientation, were further accentuated by the rise to power in February, 1966 of the extreme Ba'athist

faction headed by Salah Jedid. The new ruling group was to give the communists, for the first time in Syrian history, representation in the government.

Despite these developments, there was some positive change in the nature of Turkish-Syrian relations during this period. It consisted of the removal of the confrontational element that had characterized these relations for so long. In the World arena, an easing of tension between the superpowers was accompanied by the first sign of Turkish rapprochement with the Soviet bloc. This trend naturally had its effect on Turkey's view of Soviet allies in the Middle East. Finally, Turkey's preoccupation during the early 1960s with the question of Cyprus gave further impetus to this partial "disengagement" from Arab affairs. The combined result of these factors was that Turkish-Syrian relations, while still cool, no longer revolved around the major question of the "destiny" of the area, but around several relatively 'simple' bilateral issues. These included, for example, the problems of illegal border crossings and smuggling, the mutual restriction on the property of citizens of the other country, the apportionment of waters of common rivers, and Syria's possible support for Turkish terrorists. Other issues, such as Alexandretta and Israel, constituted long-standing irritants, but they, too, were not allowed by both countries to get out of hand.

Turkey continued, in fact, to express a desire to set relations with Syria on a healthier basis. The downgrading of

relations with Israel and the adoption of a more pro-Arab stance on the Arab-Israeli conflict would, it was thought, remove a major obstacle in the way of improving relations with the Arab World. The Middle Eastern crisis of 1967 clearly demonstrated this shift in Turkish policy. Before the outbreak of hostilities, Foreign Minister Ihsan Sabri Cagloyngil told Arab ambassadors in Ankara that "Turkey still hoped for peace and stability and that Turkey would not take any hostile action against her Arab neighbors nor allow NATO bases in Turkey to be used against the Arabs". He specifically assured Syria that Turkey did not intend to concentrate troops on the frontier. Following the war, Turkey repeatedly declared its opposition to the acquisition of territory by force (this could also have been a possible reference to Arab irredentism in Turkey). It was imperative for Israel to evacuate the territories it had occupied, Turkey announced, adding that the Middle Eastern peace should be re-established in conformity with Arab interests. Positions reflecting an even greater pro-Arab stance were expressed later during the October War of 1973, when Turkey once again pointed out that it had not allowed its military facilities to be used for shipping arms and equipment to Israel, that it had, by contrast, adopted a "flexible" interpretation of the Montreux Straits Convention to allow Soviet arms shipments and that it had even postponed military maneuvers on its Syrian borders

and supported the recognition of the "legitimate rights of the Palestinians".

Turkey's support of the Arab countries did not escape the attention of Syria. Speaking on August 21, 1967, the Syrian Foreign Minister, Ibrahim Makhus, expressed his appreciation: "Turkish support of the Arabs during recent crisis, both in and outside the United Nations, has created feelings of appreciation and gratitude in the Syrian people...and the continued support of Turkey to the just Arab cause will help to erase the traces of aggression and, in consequence, will strengthen the friendly and neighborly relations between the two countries."

A more tangible response, however, was slow to appear. If Turkish overtures towards the Arabs were expected to change their positions on the Cyprus question, then the results, at least with regard to Syria, were clearly disappointing. Preferring, as did other Arab states, the non-aligned Makarios to NATO member Turkey and her clients on the island, Syria generally voted against Turkish interests in the United Nations and in other international bodies. This anti-Turkish pattern was manifest even in Islamic conferences, in spite of common religion shared by Syrians and Turks.

Not until the early 1970s were there any significant signs of change in Syrian policy towards Turkey. The real turning point in Turkish-Syrian relations, with Syria beginning to demonstrate a readiness to achieve understanding with its

northern neighbor, may be linked with the ousting from power in late 1970 of Salah Jedid and his replacement by the Ba'ath faction headed by Hafez al-Assad. Contrary to his predecessor, who had allowed the communists a foothold in the government and increased Syria's dependency upon the Soviet Union thereby isolated Syria in the Arab World, Assad opted for a more flexible foreign policy. though he maintained cooperation with the Soviet Union, he sought to bring about a reconciliation between Syria and the Arab states as well as the West. All this was bound to have obvious repercussions on Syria's policy towards Turkey.

The change towards Turkey was expressed in various ways: renewed efforts by the Syrians to bring an end to some of their bilateral conflicts with Turkey, expansion of mutual trade, agreements on cooperation in various fields and a readiness to upgrade the level of contacts between the two countries. This last aspect was perhaps the most visible and dramatic. For years, what contacts there were had largely been held through junior diplomatic officials. Now, a frequent exchange of visits by ministers, including foreign ministers and other high-ranking government officials, began to take place.

First of the foreign ministers "to break the ice" was Turkey's Haluk Bayulken, who flew to Damascus in December, 1972 as guest of Syrian counterpart, Abdal-Halim Khadam. According to their closing joint statement, the two ministers

covered in their talks the whole range of Turkish-Syrian relations, agreeing to accelerate work on the solution of some of the outstanding problems as well as to further cooperation in such fields as trade, transport, aviation and tourism. In an important move for Turkey, Syria declared in the same statement its support for the independence and sovereignty of Cyprus and a solution based on the rights of both Greeks and Turks. Khadam reciprocated with a visit to Ankara in July, 1973 and various agreements for cooperation were reviewed and apparently decided upon. Syria was willing to express its support for Turkish (as well as Greek) rights in Cyprus. The reported success of the talks was such that a Turkish observer characterized Turkish-Syrian relations as having "jumped" to the level of real friendship. True to the accord, Khadam and the new Turkish Foreign Minister, Turan Guner, exchanged visits in April and June 1974, respectively; in May, 1975, the foreign ministers of the two countries met briefly at Ankara airport.

Thereafter, no exchange of visits between foreign ministers took place for a number of years, and there was a certain lull in the progress towards cooperation. Turkey was displeased with Syria's welcome to President Makarios in June, 1975 and its voting record on the Cyprus issue in international bodies. Syria's occupation of Lebanon in 1976 and its continued intervention in Lebanese affairs were also opposed. In late 1977, Syria closed the railway line with Iraq, a

measure, as Syria claimed, that was directed against Iraq, but one that did disrupt important links between Turkey and Iraq until the line was reopened in early 1979. Finally, Syria complained that Turkey was giving refuge to some of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood and other opposition members at a time of growing agitation in that country against the Ba'ath regime. Turkey, in turn, angrily pointed to the leniency shown towards Turkish anarchists operating from Syrian territory.

Despite these differences, there was little evidence that either Turkey or Syria had given up their determination to retain the level of relations which had already been reached. In June, 1981, Khadam was again in Ankara as guest of Foreign Minister Ilter Turkmen, and the latter returned the visit in March, 1983. These meetings seem to have been "political", largely revolving around the question of terrorism, as well as other bilateral problems, but an atmosphere of goodwill was reported to have prevailed during the talks. During Turkmen's visit to Damascus, the two countries ratified an extradition agreement and appear to have agreed on "dynamic cooperation". These renewed contacts between foreign ministers were "supplemented" by other exchanges, more economic in nature. In March, 1982, Deputy Prime Minister Turgut Ozal went to Damascus, where he signed no fewer than five different agreements on cooperation as well as a trade protocol. Syria's Deputy Prime Minister Abd al-Qadri Qaddura

met with a number of Turkish ministers in Ankara in July to discuss mutual projects.

The high-level contacts between the countries were conducive to reaching agreement on several of the outstanding bilateral issues as well as to furthering cooperation in a number of fields. One such field, where progress was particularly evident, was trade. With its new drive to increase exports and especially to find new markets for its expanding industry, Turkey systematically sought to increase trade relations with Syria. A good export opportunity was seen in Syria's fast developing economy and geographical proximity. Syria saw similar prospects for itself. In consequence, periodic agreements were signed that envisaged an increasingly rising volume of trade between the two. Between 1977 and 1981, for example, the value of the Turkish exports to Syria rose from US \$29 million to US \$129,412,000. Turkey's imports from Syria were lower, however. In 1980, they amounted to US \$17,290,000 and in 1981. US \$19,024,000. It should be noted that among the commodities Turkey imported from Syria were oil and electricity.

Cooperative agreements were reached also in the areas of transport, aviation, tourism and communications. Of special importance to Turkey was a further agreement on highway transport that was designed to facilitate the passage of people and goods through Syrian territory to other Arab countries with which Turkey maintained strong economic links. Cultural

agreements concluded between the two countries were similarly significant inasmuch as they sought to break the barriers of bias and hostility that existed between the two peoples. It is noteworthy that the cultural agreement signed in December, 1981 specifically included a paragraph on the need to eliminate expressions of hostility from the school textbooks.

These agreements and cooperative ventures in fields other than trade seemed, in practice, to lag behind. Nevertheless, by the middle 1980s, both countries seemed eager to explore even more avenues for cooperation, and the effort in itself was significant.

C. SOME CONTINUOUS BONES OF CONTENTION

1. The Border

The delineation of the border between Syria and Turkey as agreed upon between Kemalist Turkey and France did not, in itself, give full satisfaction to the two countries. The Syrian claim over Alexandretta may have generated the most tension, but was not the sole problem along the 835-mile-long border that preoccupied the two from the very establishment of relations between them. One perennial problem was - and still is - that of smuggling, not a small amount of which consisted of illegal narcotics. Another was the illegal crossing of people. This latter problem was, in some instances, "innocent" enough, given the fact that the border in many places cut across areas inhabited by people of common kinship

(Turks, Arabs or Kurds) and family, and in some cases even divided farmers and their lands. In other instances, these illegal crossings were effected by refugees or by people deliberately attempting to escape the hand of the law. Whatever the case, Turkish and Syrian authorities normally cooperated in attempting to put a stop to the illegal crossings of both people and goods. They also showed consideration towards farmers with property across the border by issuing local permits allowing them to tend their crops on the other side.

Sometimes, however, the illegal crossings led to serious incidents. At the height of the tension caused by the signing of the Baghdad Pact, Syrian authorities imposed strict control over the movement of Kurdish tribes following information that they were spying for Turkey, and the Syrian press carried reports of Turkish propaganda among the Syrian Turkomans inhabiting the border areas.

Potentially explosive were incidents involving the armed forces themselves, which increased during military concentrations or maneuvers on each side of the border. At the height of Turkey UAR tensions in July, 1958, Turkish authorities closed the frontiers for a few months and prevented Syrian farmers from tilling their lands across the border. Syria reacted by prohibiting its citizens from travelling to Turkey, and about a year later, Turkey expelled from the border areas a number of Syrian farmers who held permits to tend their crops.

In November, 1961, Turkish and Syrian representatives met and, among other things, settled questions relating to crossing permits given to Syrian citizens living along the border. Although the upsurge of anarchism in Turkey in the late 1960s and again in the late 1970s increased illegal crossings and arms smuggling by militants either entering Turkey from Syria or escaping the hand of Turkish authorities in the opposite direction, it did not tend to create serious incidents along the border. Syria, in any event, was careful not to show support for the terrorists. The most constant feature of the Turkish-Syrian border remained "regular" smuggling, which, as estimated for 1981, even surpassed legal trade in value. The subject was discussed at virtually all meetings between officials of both countries, and a special protocol on customs and the prevention of smuggling was included among the agreements signed by Ozal during his visit to Damascus in February, 1982. Turkey, probably as part of its drive to increase exports, attempted to "legalize" the trade that had been going on through smuggling, and by 1983, smuggling was indeed reported to have lessened. At the same time, Turkey and Syria, in line with the desire to see their mutual border reflect peace and cooperation, consented to accelerate work on demining the area, thereby opening new tracts of land for farming.

2. Lost Property

Having lived for many years under the canopy of one state, it was natural for Turks and Arabs to reside and acquire property wherever they wished within the Ottoman empire. The delination of the border between Turkey and Syria following World War I left large Arab and Turkish populations on the "wrong" side of the border. Some who had possessed properties away from their homes now found their real estate under control of a country not their own. In some cases, as we have seen, the very lands that farmers had long been cultivating were now situated across the border. Whereas, some opted for new citizenship in the place where they lived, others chose to migrate to their "national homes", selling their property or leaving them behind. The Treaty of Peace concluded between the great powers and Turkey in Lausanne in July, 1923 referred to such cases.

In effect, however, this separation between persons and their properties led to numerous legal and practical difficulties. Moreover, friction between the two countries resulted whenever legislation in one country threatened to infringe upon the rights of the other country's citizens. Thus in April, 1953, Turkey invoked the Treaty of Lausanne after Syria had legislated to prohibit non-Syrian citizens from purchasing agricultural land. A more serious controversy erupted in September, 1958 after the UAR had promulgated a special land reform law for the Syrian region that

affected, of course, Turkish landowners as well. Turkey did not lodge a formal protest, but, subsequently, began to exercise repressive measures against Syrian landowners in Turkey. Syrian farmers with land in Turkey were reported to be pressured to exchange their property with Turks owning land in Syria, and to be prevented from tending their crops on the other side of the border. These measures were intensified in 1966 following the ascendancy of the extreme socialist Ba'athist faction under Jedid. This time, the Turkish government reacted sharply by ordering the requisition of land and property belonging to Syrian citizens in the Hatay (Alexandretta) province. In retaliation, Syria froze all movable and immovable assets of Turkish citizens in Syria and curtailed decisions concerning transactions involving Turkish assets.

The "lost property" issue thus assumed the character of a new crisis between the two countries. Being unwilling during this period to accentuate conflicts needlessly between them, however, Turkey and Syria soon began a joint search for a solution. The talks dragged on for a number of years. Syria, clearly unwilling to forego the stipulations of its land-reform laws, made not very lucrative offers for the compensation of Turkish landowners. Turkey's Foreign Minister Caglayangil was impelled to warn in January, 1969 that should an agreement on the matter fail, Turkey would distribute Syrian lands to Turks who had property in Syria. Finally, in early 1970, there were reports of a breakthrough. In May,

1972, a property-compensation agreement was initialed and was duly signed in December, 1972 during Foreign Minister Bayulken's visit to Damascus. A special commission was charged with implementing the agreement. Henceforth, the question of property ceased to occupy an important place in bilateral relations between Turkey and Syria. The actual compensation to landowners and the removal of restrictions were destined, however, to be negotiated for many years to come; as late as early 1983 (when a new protocol was signed), these issues had not been fully settled.

3. The Apportionment of River Waters

National and political divisions superimposed on the realities of nature forced Turkey and Syria to share the benefits of rivers flowing through the territory of both, making one country or the other dependent on the goodwill of its neighbor. Development projects carried out in one country that aimed at using more river water for either irrigation or hydroelectric power were destined to create uneasiness in the other and did, in fact, intermittently constitute a source of contention between the two.

Chronologically, the Asi (Orontes) River, which flows through Syria in a generally northern direction and then enters the province of Hatay (Alexandretta) and bears southwest towards the Mediterranean, was the first to cause controversy. In 1956, Syria accelerated planning for the Al-Ghab Valley project, which involved drying its swamps and

opening new areas for cultivation, the additional water to be made available for irrigation from a new dam on the Asi. Turkey announced its opposition, claiming that the project would inflict losses on Turkish farmers. No serious bilateral talks ensued, and the question remained unsettled. The issue did come up in later talks, in connection with the utilization of the waters of the Euphrates River, when Turkey was reported to have demanded an overall settlement that would include the Asi (and also the Tigris), but the demand was rejected.

Of the two other major rivers shared by Turkey and Syria, the Tigris and the Euphrates, the latter, in particular, appears to have been the object of large-scale, highly prestigious development plans in both countries. The Euphrates originates in the eastern highlands of Turkey, flows southward into Syria, and then heads towards Iraq and the Gulf in a southeasterly direction, actually making it the possession of three states. In 1974, Turkey completed a major irrigation and power project, the Keban Dam on the river and was preparing plans for three more dams to be built in the course of 20 years. Syria's main development project for the Euphrates was the Tabqa Dam, partially completed in 1973 and similarly used for irrigation and power production. Iraq, naturally, had long been a prime benefactor of the Euphrates waters and had its own plans for further exploiting them. Being the third country through which the river flowed, it was primarily Iraq that became concerned at the development

projects of the two other countries. Syria's own concern at Turkey's plans, however, was also quite obvious.

Tripartite talks on the proper apportionment of the waters of the Euphrates River were held intermittently during the early 1960s. In 1966, Turkey appears to have committed itself to supplying both Syria and Iraq with 300 cubic meters per second of the waters. The issue, however, came to the foreground in a more serious fashion in the early 1970s, when the Turkish and Syrian dams were nearing completion. Iraq, in particular, voiced its fear of a possible loss of water, and its differences with Syria on this matter accentuated its already existing points of conflict with that country. But, when in March, 1974 Turkey began filling the Keban Lake in preparation for the operation of its power plant, both Syria and Iraq complained that Turkey had considerably reduced the flow of the river to well below the agreed quantities. When Turkey informed its neighbors that it could not, for a few months, allow more than 100 cubic meters per second to pass through the dam, Syria and Iraq retorted that they were in equal need for increased supplies to their respective lakes at Tabqa and Habaniyya. Only after Turkey resumed the river's normal flow, did the controversy largely abate, although Syria continued to demand a tripartite conference for finally determining the apportionment of the Euphrates waters.

With the approaching completion of Karakaya, Turkey's second major dam on the Euphrates, and its preparations for a

third in the early 1980s, Syria once again began to voice apprehensions. The second dam alone, it was feared, might reduce by no less than 27 percent the supply of water to Syria, as well as to retain most of the valuable silt in Turkish territory. Turkey, reported to be ready to give assurances to Syria, seems at the same time to have used the Euphrates issue as leverage in discussions over Armenian and Kurdish terrorism. By the middle 1980s, a clear long-term solution to the issue had not yet been found. Given the ongoing projects in all three countries for the exploitation of the Euphrates River, the prospects for further friction remain high.

4. Terrorism

Syria's possible aid to Turkish anarchists constituted the most recent issue in the bilateral relations between Turkey and Syria. The late 1960s witnessed the rise of various radical, especially leftists, military groups in Turkey that took more and more to outright terrorist activities. Turkey suspected that many of the anarchists had received training, arms and other means of support in Palestinian installations in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon, or else had found refuge in these camps after fleeing from Turkey. Fearful of plots by outsiders to overthrow the Turkish regime but careful not to accuse Arab countries directly of cooperating with terrorism, Turkey voiced its concern to the Arab governments and demanded that they not extend their protection to Turkish terrorists.

Much of Turkey's concern was directed at Syria, especially after Jordan had eliminated Palestinian bases on its territory late in 1970 and Syria, together with Lebanon, has become the Palestinians' main base of operations. Following the assassination of Israeli Consul-General Ephraim Elrom in Istanbul in May, 1971, Turkey's Prime Minister Nihat Erim explicitly stated that although there was no proof of a link between Turkish terrorists and the Arab countries, it was clear that militants had in fact, been trained by the Fatah in Syria. Syria rejected all charges of complicity in Turkish terrorist activities denying even the existence of operation bases on its soil. It was only when Turkish terrorism gradually declined for a time in the mid 1970s that this new strain on Turkish-Syrian relations somewhat abated.

After the military coup in Turkey in September, 1980, and particularly during 1982-83, Syria was implicated once again in anti-Turkish activities. Turkey's ruling generals had been fairly successful in eradicating both left- and right-wing terrorist organizations, but now found it difficult to cope with a new wave of Armenian terrorism, which operated mostly abroad and against Turkish diplomats. To a lesser extent, the generals also faced growing signs of Kurdish separatism. To the Turks, Syria seemed to play a certain role, at least by turning a blind eye to Armenian and Kurdish activities from Syrian territory (or from Syrian-occupied Lebanon). The Turkish press carried many reports of such

activities, some of these accounts implicating official Syrian bodies. In fact, Turkey was not content with protests and warnings, but took care to supply the Syrian government with relevant evidence. Denying again any complicity, Syria responded that it had never allowed, and would never allow, anti-Turkish activities to be conducted in or from its territory. But as Foreign Minister Turkned put it, "Syria always promises, but the information is different."

The two countries did, however, sign an extradition agreement in 1981 that came into force, as has been mentioned, after Turkmen's visit to Damascus in March, 1983. Allowing extradition of persons sought for crimes committed against Turkey, the agreement did not, however, cover "political" cases. Indeed in the mid 1980s, Syria's possible role in facilitating Armenia and Kurdish operations against Turkey came to constitute the greatest strain on Turkish-Syrian relations.

Regarding itself as the cradle of Arab nationalism and its main torchbearer, Syria finds it difficult to forget not only the conflicts of the past, but also the very real wound of Alexandretta-Hatay. The province seems to stand as a reminder that accounts between Syria and Turkey, or between Arab nationalism and Turkey, have not yet been fully settled. Although the issue has remained politically dormant, there is no question that psychologically it has exercised a strong impact on Syrian attitudes. This attitude that Turkey's

Foreign Minister Caglayangil may have referred to in February, 1968, when he said that whereas Turkey was constantly trying to improve its relations with the Syrians, Syria continued to use the question of Hatay for "political purposes".

Frustrated with Turkey's failure to persuade President Assad to change his position on a particular matter, a Turkish diplomat once commented that there was little that could be done: "Damascus does not like us."⁹⁴

⁹⁴This section (The Syrian-Turkish Relations) is quoted from David Kushner, "Conflict and Accommodation in Turkish-Syrian Relations," in Syria under Assad, edited by Moshe Maoz and Avner Yaniv, St. Martin Press, New York, 1986, pp 85-103.

XVII. THE SOVIET-SYRIAN RELATIONS

One of the most striking features of Syria's rise to the status of an important regional power has been its success in exploiting its relations with the Soviet Union for advancing its own interests. The Soviets are not averse to Syria's ascent, since in broad terms, any gain in stature and influence by their ally would also be regarded as a gain for themselves. Nevertheless, the march of the Syrians towards a position of regional power has occasionally faced the Soviets with exceedingly difficult situations.

The growing Syrian involvement in the Lebanese imbroglio in the course of the 1970s is a good case in point. Moscow was not at all opposed to the increase in Syria's influence in Lebanon. When, however, the situation there brought the Syrians into open conflict with Israel, the United States and the PLO, the Soviet Union at times faced the difficult prospect of a major confrontation that could harm not only its own position in the region, but also its global standing. Even the well-being of the Soviets in the most immediate sense could have been affected. On these occasions, the Soviets must have wondered whether or not their great investment in Syria made them capable of stopping the Syrians from moving ahead.⁹⁵

⁹⁵Freedman, Robert O., "Moscow, Damascus and the Lebanon Crisis," in Syria under Assad, edited by Moshe Maoz and Avner Yaniv, St. Martin Press, New York, 1986, p. 224.

The events proved that there were limitations on their ability to do so.

The relationship between Syria and the Soviet Union is typical of patron-client ties between major powers and developing countries. While the patron seeks influence through provisions of economic and military assistance, the client retains the initiative in defining the terms of the relationship and in pursuing policies consistent with its core interests. Syria has received generous amounts of Soviet assistance in terms of credits, military hardware, and economic aid; on many occasions, however, the Soviets have been unable to dissuade Damascus from taking actions which were inconsistent with Moscow's objectives. Within the constraints of the Soviet-Syrian relationship, it is the Syrians who clearly have the upper hand in defining their joint interests in the Middle East.⁹⁶ Each country provides a vital service for the other. The Soviet bloc is Syria's only source of weapons: it rebuilt Syrian air defenses after the 1982 Lebanese war and spent 2 billion dollars on Syria's behalf between 1979-85. Syria offers Moscow its sole if restricted opportunity to influence events in the Middle East. The USSR remains unable to persuade Syria to reconcile

⁹⁶Ramet, Pedro, "The Soviet-Syrian Relationship," Problems of Communism, vol. No. 35, ISS, No. 5, September/October, 1986, pp 35-46.

with PLO Chairman Yasir Arafat or to resolve differences between the Syrian and Iraqi Ba'athist parties.⁹⁷

A. SOVIET POLICY OBJECTIVES

Soviet objectives in the Third World have been a matter of some disagreement among Western observers, particularly with respect to whether Soviet policy is motivated more by Soviet national interests or by ideology. Adherents of the former view tend to see Soviet activities in the Third World as deriving primarily from the USSR's quest for great power status and promotion of traditional state interests, while those who emphasize the ideological bent see the spread of communism as more of a driving force. Elements of both are no doubt present in Soviet policy motivations and, whatever the genesis, can give rise to behavior equally threatening to U.S. interests.⁹⁸

After the end of World War II, the Soviet Union emerged with global ambitions. Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko has stated that no problem in the world can be resolved without Soviet participation, a statement indicating that Moscow has a rather broad conception of its own security concerns.

⁹⁷Walker, Martin, "A Marriage of Necessity," Sout 155-63, January, 1986, pp 23-24.

⁹⁸Stephen T. Hosmer and Thomas W. Wolf, "Soviet Policy and Practice toward Third World Conflicts," D. C. Heath and Company, Lexington, Massachusetts; Toronto, 1983, p. 127.

The Soviets have signed friendship treaties with a dozen or so countries in Asia, Africa and the Middle East (including Syria), all of which imply a considerable degree of commitment to the security of those far-flung countries.⁹⁹

B. HOW DID THE SOVIETS PENETRATE INTO SYRIA?

While usually accepting the anti-imperialist tenet of Marxism-Leninism, the Syrians have usually rejected such other basic tenets of the Soviet doctrine as the supremacy of the working class, dialectical materialism, and atheism - indeed, the identification of the Soviet Union with atheism has proved to be a major obstacle to the spread of Soviet influence through the predominantly Muslim Middle East where religion plays a major role in every day life, a role that has increased in importance since 1970.¹⁰⁰ But the Arabs, especially the states of confrontation with Israel were beset with Zionism. To the Arabs, Zionism is more abhorrent than atheism. In 1950, when the Syrians became frustrated of Washington's unstinting support to Israel, they declared their famous statements that they would rather become "Sovietized" than "Judaized" and that it was proper to collaborate with the Soviet Union as "an enemy of their

⁹⁹Zagoria, Donald S., "Soviet Policy in East Asia," Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1982, p. 1.

¹⁰⁰Freedman, Robert O., "Soviet Policy toward the Middle East since 1970," Praeger Publisher, Third Edition, 1982, p. 3.

enemy," i.e. of the U.S., in the same way that the Arabs had collaborated with Nazi Germany as the enemy of Britain.¹⁰¹

Although the Soviet Union played an important role in the creation of the State of Israel, Russia proved that she is more flexible and skillful than the West in general in ameliorating her problems with the Arabs and in starting a new era with them since 1955. For the Russians, the Arabs enmity with Israel was a very small price for their friendship with the Arab states.

In its efforts to weaken and ultimately eliminate Western influence from the Middle East, and particularly from the Arab World, while promoting Soviet influence, the Soviet leadership has employed a number of tactics. First and foremost has been the supply of military aid to its regional clients. Next in importance comes economic aids: the Aswan Dam in Egypt and the Euphrates Dam in Syria are prominent examples of Soviet economic assistance. In recent years, Moscow has also sought to solidify its influence through the conclusion of long-term friendship and cooperation treaties, such as the ones with Egypt (1971), Iraq (1972), Syria (1980) and Somalia (1974). Repudiations of the treaties by Egypt (1976) and Somalia (1977) indicate that this has not always been a too successful

¹⁰¹Lenczowski, George, "The Middle East in World Affairs," Fourth Edition, p. 331.

tactic. Moscow has also attempted to exploit both the lingering memories of Western colonialism and Western threats against Arab oil producers. Another tactic has been the establishment of party-to-party relations between the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and the ruling parties in a number of Middle Eastern one-party states. It has offered the Arabs diplomatic support at such international forums as the United Nations and the Geneva Conference (on an Arab-Israeli peace settlement). Finally, Moscow has given the Arabs direct military aid for use against Israel. This last, though, has been limited in scope because Moscow continues to support Israel's right to exist both for fear of unduly alienating the United States, with whom the Russians desire additional SALT agreements and improved trade relations, and for maintaining Israel as a convenient rallying point for potentially anti-Western forces in the Arab World.¹⁰²

C. THE SOVIET MILITARY AID TO SYRIA

The Soviet military aid to Syria is of different types. On December 11, 1955, the Syrian outposts east of Lake Tiberias were subjected to a terrible Israeli attack. Fifty-six Syrian lives were lost.¹⁰³ The Syrians determined to acquire sophisticated weapons from the West, but they were

¹⁰²Freedman, Robert O., "Syria under Assad," p. 225.

¹⁰³George Lenczowski, p. 340.

rebuffed. The Syrians now had no choice but to turn toward the Soviet bloc and concluded a barter deal with Communist Czechoslovakia whereby Syrian wheat and cotton were to be exchanged for undisclosed quantity of heavy military equipment and munitions. After this deal, the Soviet Union became the main source of weapons to the Syrian army. The quality and quantity of Soviet military aid to Syria were increased gradually and cautiously since 1956.

Alongside with the arms delivery, the Soviets sent military advisers and technicians to assist essentially in three functions: the delivery, assembly, and maintenance of military equipment; the training of local personnel in the operation and maintenance of equipment; and the instructing of indigenous military officers in staff and operational units. It is estimated that there are between 5,000 to 8,000 Soviet advisers and technicians now.

D. PRICES AND TERMS

Much of the attractiveness of Soviet military assistance has been due to the comparatively low prices and favorable terms offered by Moscow. The prices charged to Syria have varied with the type and condition of the equipment, but on the whole, Soviet prices have been substantially below Western prices for comparable equipment. For example, the price of the new U.S. F-15 fighter charged Israel averaged about \$12 million per craft, while the price of a Soviet

MIG-23 fighter reportedly averaged about \$6.7 million. The price for an MIG-21 fighter reportedly listed at \$2 million, while that of an F-4 was \$5.7 million. While the types of aircraft cited are not fully comparable in terms of characteristics and capabilities, the wide variation in reported prices serves to illustrate the point.

Besides low prices, the Soviets have offered attractive financial terms to recipients. Credits generally have been made available at 2 percent interest, with repayment periods averaging 10 years, following a grace period of one to three years. Moreover, to clients hardpressed for foreign exchange like Syria, Moscow frequently has permitted repayment in local currency or commodities. In addition, Moscow often has postponed payment when Syria has been unable to meet her scheduled obligations. Discounts from list prices have been an intrinsic feature of military assistance. Such discounts reportedly have averaged about 40 percent of the value of Soviet contracts.¹⁰⁴

E. EFFECTIVENESS OF THE MILITARY AID IN RELATION TO SOVIET OBJECTIVES

Of the various types of foreign assistance employed by the Soviets - military, economic, and technical - "military" aid

¹⁰⁴Donaldson, Robert H., "The Soviet Union in the Third World: Success and Failures," Westview Press, Inc., U.S. Second Printing, 1981, p 386, pp 393-94.

has proven to be the most dramatic and consequential. Besides directly contributing to the emergence, growth, and survival of nonaligned regimes like Syrian regime, arms aid has fostered an image of the Soviet Union as a benign but powerful anti-colonialist power. Furthermore, military aid has often provided the opening wedge for a variety of diplomatic, trade, cultural, and other contacts which would have been difficult or impossible to achieve. Through the military aid, the Soviets emerged as an advocate of a recipient's national aspirations and was able to facilely exploit this position to the detriment of Western interests. Arab-Israeli tensions are examples of opportunities which were initially ripe for Soviet exploitation.

In addition to the broader objective of undermining Western influence in recipient countries like Syria, the Soviet leadership has used military assistance and sales to affect Western strategic interests and to eliminate Western military facilities and alliances adjacent to Soviet borders.¹⁰⁵ Syria was a great help to Moscow to neutralize the Baghdad Pact and disrupted partially the West's "northern tier" defenses against her.

¹⁰⁵Robert H. Donaldson, p. 394.

F. THE SOVIET ECONOMIC AID TO SYRIA

Syria is among the countries which are heavily indebted to the Soviets for political, military and economic assistance. In 1956, Czechoslovakia won a contract for the construction of the first Syrian oil refinery at Homs. From that time on, most of the economic and industrial projects were achieved by the assistance of the Soviet bloc. Among the great projects which were achieved by the Soviet's assistance were the construction of a big dam on the Euphrates River in 1966 and the development of Syria's oil fields in Suwaidiyah, Karachuk, and Rumailan.¹⁰⁶ We can hardly find any economic project achieved in Syria without Soviet help.

G. ECONOMIC AID AND SOVIET OBJECTIVES

The economic aid program is a prominent component of a broader tactical shift in foreign policy designed to extend Soviet influence in the underdeveloped countries. There are at least two significant aspects to the recent growth of Soviet influence and power. One is the increasing ability to deflect the policies of the underdeveloped countries in directions favorable to Soviet objectives. The second is the weakening of the influence of the West. The Soviet leaders recognized that to aid business is an effective weapon in achieving the upper mentioned objectives. Moscow used it

¹⁰⁶George Lenczowski, p. 342, p. 344.

effectively in Syria. The sheer weight of the Soviet economic aid in the Syrian economy may be sufficient for the Soviet bloc to acquire a considerable measure of influence.

H. THE TERMS OF THE PROGRAM

Of all the advantages the Russians advertise in their aid program, perhaps the one that has made the greatest impact is the assertion that aid is given with absolutely "no strings attached". The very expression has become part of a formula used by leaders of underdeveloped countries in public statements on their aid negotiations with the USSR Minister of Economy. Kallas of Syria praised the USSR for having given aid "with no conditions" attached. The very novelty of the Soviet program is itself an advantage; it offers promising new prospects and breaks what many recipient nations saw as the United States' virtual monopoly of aid giving. Moreover, to many people in the underdeveloped countries including Syria, the USSR does not appear to be the aggressive villain of the world drama usually portrayed in the West. The Soviet authorities have fashioned the terms of their aid program so as to mitigate the latent fears of the recipients and to appeal to many of their aspirations.¹⁰⁷ The details of the

¹⁰⁷Berliner, Joseph S., "Soviet Economic Aid: The New Aid and Trade Policy in Underdeveloped Countries," New York, 1958, pp 14, 17, 37, 137, 163.

interest and payment of this program are the same as that of the military aid and have been explained earlier in detail.

I. THE SOVIETS INVOLVEMENT IN SYRIA'S REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL PROBLEMS

In 1956, the U.S. government was determined to saddle the Middle East countries with treaties based on the Eisenhower Doctrine. Many of them, Syria included, refused military cooperation with the United States. To break down Syria's resistance, Washington commenced to prepare armed intervention. Turkey massed an army of 50,000 supported by 500 tanks on the Turkish-Syrian frontier. At the same time, Israel organized border incidents. The Syrian government raised strong and well-publicized objections to the massive placing of Turkish and Israeli troops on the border, accusing Turkey, Israel and the United States of planning armed intervention. Soviet assurances of assistance to Syria, coupled with threats to Turkey, were gratefully acknowledged by the Syrian propaganda agencies.¹⁰⁸ At that time, the Soviet influence reached its apogee and Syria barely missed becoming a Soviet satellite.

The period of union between Egypt and Syria (1958-1961) was the darkest days to the Syrian communists in particular and the Soviet influence in general. The Syrian communist leaders included Khalid Bakdash who fled the country to live

¹⁰⁸George Lenzowski, p. 338.

in exile in the Soviet bloc while some of the operative leaders like Faraj Allah al-Hiliw and Said al-Drooby were eliminated, the former by liquidating him in acid and the latter by strangling him. Although the communists survived despite all the torture they incurred during the Union in Syria, they could not rehabilitate themselves to play the political role that they did before the Union. Although they were represented in the National Front and in the Syrian cabinet by two portfolios, this representation is nominal and their political activity is curtailed by law.

J. THE RUSSIANS REACTION TO THIS SUPPRESSION

The Soviets did not and would not criticize the Syrians openly consistent with their principle or commitment not to interfere in the national affairs of the Syrians but implicitly they are very angry with the Arab behavior in general and the Syrians in particular.

The Soviets are like an octopus; when it loses one arm, it can survive by the other arm; not only that but the severed arm can grow up by time. Although the Soviets interests were affected by the ordeal of the Syrian communists, they did not lose their influence in Syria completely because of their diversified aids. But this does not mean that the Syrians yielded to Soviets blindly and helplessly. On many occasions, the Syrians ignored the Soviet advice and warning and followed their natural and regional interests.

From 1961 to 1963, Syria was ruled by a pro-Western Conservative regime. Like all the former Constitutional pro-Western regimes, the Conservatives were not in complete control. The Syrian communists were not in a hurry to rush into the political arena and the Soviets were waiting and watching to see who would be the real masters of Syria.

On March 8, 1963, the Ba'ath Party seized power in Syria. The first Ba'athist government was headed by Salah al-Bitar and represented the right wing of the party. This wing was famous in their hatred of the West and the Soviets as well. The rightists considered Britain, France and U.S. as representatives and champions of Western Imperialism and the Soviets the champions of Eastern Imperialism and sometimes they looked on the new Soviet imperialism as worst than the traditional one.

To the joys of the Syrian communists, the right wing of the Ba'ath did not last long in power. The left wing under the leadership of Salah Jedid usurped the power promptly. The leftists aimed at more drastic socioeconomic transformations in Syria to conform to their socialist model which was tinged with a good deal of Marxist thought. They nationalized more than 200 industrial enterprises in 1965. At this period, the Syrian communists returned to Syria and enjoyed some type of political freedom. General Salah Jedid, dared to declare that the only way to emancipate Palestine from Zionism is by adopting Marxism and concluding a military pact with Russia

of the same model of the pact between the Soviets and Eastern Europe. In the sector of foreign policy, the regime displayed considerable hostility toward the United States, largely because of its pro-Israeli stance, and, by the same token, favored more intimate relations with the Soviet Union and the socialist bloc. This pro-Soviet attitude found its expression in the generous Soviet economic and military aids aforementioned in this paper. On the political level inside Syria, the radicals of the Ba'ath Party opened the door to the rehabilitation and cooperation with the Syrian communist party. Thus, Syria's exiled communist leader Khalid Bakdash was allowed to return from exile (he spent a number of years in Russia) while at the same time two communist leaders, Sami Attiyah and Ahmad Murad, were given ministerial posts in the cabinet in charge of communications and economics, respectively. This golden and fertile period to communism lasted till 1970 when General Hafez Assad usurped the power from the leftist in a military coup. In 1967 war with Israel, Syria was defeated bitterly, and here again, the Soviets poured their largess on the Syrians on all levels.

In 1970, the Syrians sent a tank brigade across the border to northern Jordan to help the Palestinian Fedayeen in their war against King Hussein of Jordan. There was a distinct possibility of escalation, with the Soviet Union, the principal arms supplier of Syria and the United States, the protector of King Hussein, likely to intervene if their respective

clients were to find themselves in serious difficulties. Thus, an international conflagration of major proportions was narrowly avoided.¹⁰⁹

General Hafez Assad, supported by his military colleagues, ousted General Jedid and the leftist government. For the Syrian communists, this political movement was a terrible blow. Assad actually was not a moderate; he was a rightist Ba'athist and he was still famous for his suspicions towards communism. Although the communist leaders are represented in his National Front and Cabinet, the party is suppressed under his regime. In 1973, Assad with Sadat launched a war against Israel without any coordination with Russia. But each limited war between Israel and Syria proved to be in the Soviet favor. The Soviets are not gullible in politics. They know that Assad is not a loyal ally to them. Assad extends his hands to the Soviets only when he needs them. Assad always favored a limited relationship with the Soviets. When he overthrew Jedid in November, 1970, a marked cooling of Soviet-Syrian relations took place. Soviet support to Syria during the 1973 war helped to warm relations again, but the Syrian refusal to attend the Soviet cosponsored Geneva Peace Conference in 1973 and the successful shuttle diplomacy of Henry Kissinger which led both to a separation of forces agreement on the Golan Heights between Israel and Syria and the

¹⁰⁹George Lenczowski, p. 353.

re-establishment of Syrian-American diplomatic relations, again chilled Soviet-Syrian ties. Yet another change in relations occurred in 1975 when Syria turned again to the USSR after the Sinai II agreement, only to clash violently with Moscow the following year when the USSR both criticized Syria's military intervention in Lebanon and delayed promised shipment of arms. Soviet-Syrian relations warmed up again, however, in 1977 and Moscow was able to profit from the regional isolation of Syria following the Egyptian-Israeli peace agreement, the renewal of the feud between Damascus and Baghdad, and the eruption of a feud between Jordan and Syria, as well as by the growing instability within Syria to extract from the Syrians the long desired Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation which Moscow saw as giving her a formal presence in the strategically located state.¹¹⁰ Yet one can raise some questions about the ultimate value of such a treaty to both nations. Its value depends upon the broad objectives of the two nations and upon the content of the treaty to meet these objectives.

The broad Soviet objectives are the spread of communism and the quest for great power status, while the Syrian objective is the defeat of Zionism and the emancipation of Palestine. The following step is the analysis of the Soviet-Syrian Treaty of Friendship.

¹¹⁰ Robert O. Freedman, "Soviet Policy toward the Middle East," p. 436.

K. INTRODUCTION OF THE TREATY

On October 8, 1980 the Soviet Union and Syria signed a friendship and cooperation treaty. The treaty-signing raised considerable apprehension and curiosity on a number of issues. How would the new treaty influence the intensity of political and military relations between the USSR and Syria? How would it affect Damascus' military strength and freedom of political

and military action regarding other Arab countries and Israel? What new possibilities now arose regarding Syrian-oriented Soviet military involvement in the region and the enhancing of Soviet military alignment in the Middle East in general?

The answers to these questions are of cardinal significance for the strategic considerations and calculations of Israel, the United States and Arab countries in the region.

1. Background to the Signing of the Treaty

As a prelude to understanding the reasons for the signing of the treaty as well as its influence on the two countries' relations, we must attempt first to describe the two sides' expectation from it.

2. The Syrian Viewpoint

For years, despite continued pressures from Moscow, Syrian President Hafez al-Assad had avoided signing a friendship and cooperation treaty with the Soviet Union. In the early 70s, Assad himself had denounced similar agreements signed between the Soviet Union, Egypt and Iraq. As late as

the end of 1979, Assad again rejected Soviet proposals for an agreement.

Shortly thereafter, however, a number of new domestic and external considerations led the Syrian president to reconsider his objections. On the domestic plane, unrest throughout 1980 produced an immediate threat, organized subversion by the Muslim Brothers was increasing and the Syrian middle class was becoming increasingly agitated.

In these circumstances, a friendship and cooperation treaty would appear to be the logical way out. The pact would tie Moscow to Assad's regime and would provide the foundation for a possible request by Assad for active Soviet intervention if matters should deteriorate further.

On the external plane, the agreement would help deter Israel from exploiting the Syrian domestic situation and taking the military initiative. In the event that Israel were not deterred and initiated an offensive, the treaty would ensure the defense of those primary assets which the regime considered necessary for its survival - the capital, the bulk of the army and strategic facilities and infrastructures.

In this context, the agreement could possibly be exploited as a deterrent cover against Israel to facilitate new Syrian initiatives in Lebanon.

Over and above all, however, was Syria's growing regional isolation and fear that the strategic balance was tipping against her which formed the backdrop to Assad's agreement

to enter into a formal tie with the Soviet Union. The Israeli threat was looming ever larger, while Syria's strategic rear support was weakening, if not disappearing altogether. Egypt has withdrawn from the war effort; Saudi Arabia was extending its links with the U.S., Jordan was aiding the Muslim Brothers inside Syria in their struggle against the regime and the U.S. was increasing its strength and influence in the Middle East by leading the peace process, while its "clients", led by Egypt and Israel, were reaping the largely military benefits. A Syrian-Soviet agreement could balance Syria's military and political isolation, and perhaps even afford Syria some possibility of building a genuine military option.

The damage caused by the agreement in the inter-Arab sphere - and particularly among the anti-Soviet Arab regimes - would, Assad hoped, be cancelled out by an aggressive propaganda campaign. This would portray the agreement as the only way open for Syria to prevent Israeli military superiority and perhaps even an Israeli offensive against Lebanon and Syria, and as an important tool for breaking the Camp David process which in all steadfastness, Front countries opposed.

3. Soviet Viewpoint

In the bilateral Soviet-Syrian sphere, Moscow's considerable investment in Damascus was in danger. The Alawite regime was at one of its lowest points; its capacity for dealing with growing manifestations of internal unrest and

violence was in doubt. The alternative to Assad, from Moscow's vantage point, was poor; the Muslim brotherhood was Islamic extremist and anti-Soviet. In the Arab-Israeli sphere, the USSR perceived its main "client", Assad, to be at a considerable disadvantage. Following Egypt withdrawal from the war front with Israel, and as Israel's military activity in Lebanon increased to the extent of genuinely provoking the Syrian forces there, Syria found itself isolated, threatened and insecure, and felt increasingly that its Soviet ally had become unreliable.

On the regional plane, the Soviet Union was losing prestige and legitimacy throughout the Arab World due to its involvement in Afghanistan.

In the realm of superpower relations, the USSR was witness to the Carter administration's clumsy yet somewhat successful efforts at establishing a Middle East intervention capability with the aid of military facilities provided by friendly Arab or Muslim countries (Egypt, Oman and Somalia) regionally and U.S.-based mobile air and naval forces.

Against this multi-layered geopolitical backdrop, a Soviet-Syrian friendship and cooperation treaty appeared to be a decidedly positive move from the Soviet standpoint. It would strengthen President Assad and his wobbly regime, and simultaneously obstruct Assad from seeking to effect a reorientation toward the West and Washington - whether to obtain economic and military aid, or to join the U.S.

sponsored peace process. Moreover, an agreement might balance out at least some of the damage caused by the Soviet Union's controversial involvement in Afghanistan. It could bring about more active Syrian support for the Soviet position on Afghanistan at various inter-Arab forums by lending an Arab-Muslim stamp of legitimacy to the Soviet move. Then, too, such an agreement might provide a further indication to Syria's ally, Iran, regarding the Soviet desire for more intimate relations with the Khomeini regime. The agreement might also signal Iraq, which was turning increasingly to the West, that Soviet power in the Middle East was not easily dispensed with.

Israel, for its part, would have to take notice of the deterrent dimensions of the Soviet-Syrian treaty. Accordingly, its anti-Syrian provocations in the Lebanese arena would be reduced and the danger of general Israeli offensive against Syria lessened. As a consequence, Moscow might be able to restrain and moderate Syrian actions in those circumstances where Syrian involvement could endanger Soviet interests. And, finally, the treaty would to some extent constitute a Soviet reply to American activities in the region, and particularly to the U.S. entrenchment in Egypt and Saudi Arabia. It would enhance the Soviet reliability as a friend and ally to client states and allow them, if they so desired, to enlarge the physical infrastructure required for Soviet military intervention in

the Middle East with additional naval, air and other facilities.

L. STRATEGIC POLITICAL COORDINATION

It would seem reasonable to expect that a friendship and cooperation treaty that raises the level of strategic political relations between its signatories to a new, higher level would be reflected in a significant increase in the two sides' strategic coordination and mutual support, both in anticipation of and during important military and political events. During the treaty's first year, a number of such events took place. By examining them, we may shed the light on the depth and nature of the two countries coordination and support, as well as related expectations which both attached to the agreement.

M. THE SYRIAN-JORDANIAN CRISIS

On November 25, 1980, a month and a half after the signing of the Syrian-Soviet agreement, Syrian military units were deployed along the northern border with Jordan. There was no indication that Damascus had coordinated with Moscow its initial deployment of forces along the Jordan border. Just as they had had no foreknowledge of the Syrian invasion of Lebanon a few years earlier, so in the Jordan border crisis, the Soviets were again presented with a Syrian fait accompli.

Thus, judging by what is known of the Soviet-Syrian aspect of the crisis, the USSR would have to conclude that it could not depend on Syria to avoid dragging it into military crisis

without prior coordination, while Damascus could not depend on Moscow's automatic backing even when Syria's political and security interests were endangered.

N. THE MISSILES CRISIS IN LEBANON

The Soviets displayed somewhat more complex behavior in the Lebanese missile crisis. The missiles were deployed immediately after downing of the Syrian helicopters (on April 29-30, 1981), and there are no indications that the Soviets were asked about the matter, or were even informed in an orderly fashion.

O. THE ISRAELI-AMERICAN MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

From the very beginning of Israeli-U.S. contacts over strategic cooperation (in September, 1981, during Prime Minister Begin and Defense Minister Sharon's visit to Washington), Damascus grasped the anticipated cooperation agreement as a direct threat to Syria and a violation of its strategic parity with Israel. A high-level delegation led by Defense Minister Mustafa Talas departed for Moscow on September 9, 1981 for preparatory talks on "strategic cooperation with the Soviet Union". The Syrians admitted for the first time that their friendship and cooperation treaty with the Soviets was not equal to the proposed agreement between Washington and Jerusalem. In one interview, Assad even revealed some of the difficulties which had been raised by Moscow in this context:

"The Soviet Union stands by us and aids us....but that does not mean that USSR arms stores are open to us."

P. THE DETERIORATION IN RELATIONS BETWEEN THE ASSAD REGIME AND THE SYRIAN COMMUNIST PARTY

In early November, 1981, on the eve of elections to the Syrian Peoples Council, a rift developed in relations between the Assad regime and the Syrian Communist Party. The latter is one of the more important communist parties in the Arab World, and enjoys particular close links with Moscow. A leaflet put out by the party criticizing internal security measures in Syria was confiscated by the government. In that leaflet, the party nicely summed up their complaints: "When the French ruled this country (from 1920 to 1946), they failed to divide it like this regime. This regime rests on two bases: sectarianism and despotism. The citizens must contend daily with the corruption of the men in authority without seeing these people held accountable."¹¹¹

In retaliation to the government confiscation of the party leaflet and other underground pamphlets, the party newspaper Tariq al-Sha'b published a front page article which sharply criticized Assad's domestic policies. The newspaper issue was also confiscated, and the Syrian Communist Party expelled from the National Progressive Front (the central political

¹¹¹Reed III, Stanley F., "Dateline Syria: Fin De Regime," Foreign Policy, No. 37, Summer, 1980, p. 179.

organization in Syria, which is led by the Ba'ath Party and which the communists joined in 1972, thereby paving the way for their representation in the government). All eight communist party members were stricken from the list of Front candidates for Peoples Council elections, and all - including the wife of the Party leader - were subsequently defeated.

Evidently, Assad perceived the criticism leveled at him by the communists as having been Soviet inspired. It seemed to be signaling Moscow's desire to keep the sister Syrian party a safe distance away from the negative, unpopular image attached to Assad and his Ba'ath Party and to pave the communists' way into a new Syrian regime. Assad's treatment of the Syrian Communist Party hardly reflected an ideal picture of close, stable political ties with the Soviet Union.

Q. MILITARY INVOLVEMENT

During the years since the Yom Kippur War, Israeli analysts arrived at the estimate that the Soviet Union's commitment to Syria is limited, from the military standpoint, to parameters of defense-survival: the Soviet Union can be expected to intervene directly only in order to assure the very survival of the Syrian regime. As far as external (as opposed to Syrian domestic) threats are concerned, this Soviet military involvement will be probably effected on two planes; if Syria is attacked, the USSR will deploy Soviet units for designated defense tasks: anti-air-craft (SA

missiles and combat aircraft to intercept attacking enemy planes); electronic warfare (early warning, jamming, counter-measures against enemy electronic warfare), etc.

If the situation deteriorates to a point where the regime itself is endangered (conquest of the capital, massive civilian losses or infrastructure damage, etc), the Soviet Union will deploy its deterrent force and, if necessary, will employ its potential for actual intervention.

After the agreement was signed, there were no significant changes in the number of Soviet military advisers or in the form and content of the Soviet undertaking in the direction of more comprehensive intervention than previously thought probable.

R. BASES, FACILITIES, EMERGENCY STORES

No less important a dimension, in conjunction with Soviet intervention capability in Syria, is the physical infrastructure for the Russian presence. For years, Damascus has consistently avoided granting Moscow bases in Syria. The long-standing Soviet naval presence in the ports of Tartus and Latakia has been maintained under the rubric of "facilities and services" rather than "bases". There are no indications that Soviet combat supply dumps have been established in Syria after the signing of the friendship and cooperation agreement.

S. JOINT EXERCISES AND MANEUVERS

In order to avoid serious breakdowns, if not failure, if and when the presumed Soviet undertaking to intervene militarily is implemented, it is of utmost importance to practice using the various components of the intervention apparatus: transport, landing, fire cover, deployment and actual combat.

Since the signing of the friendship and cooperation treaty, only one such exercise has been held. On July 6, 1981, a Soviet landing exercise commenced on the Syrian coast. The force which landed on the beaches of Syria did not number more than 300-400 troops.

U.S. and Israeli reactions were similar: the maneuver was intended primarily for political, rather than military purposes. This joint exercise was of considerable political value. It was the Soviets' way of signaling the Arab countries that - in view of the American strategy in the region, and following joint maneuvers held by the U.S. and Egypt - the Soviet Union was also well placed on the Middle East map from the military standpoint, and had no intension of maintaining a passive role in the race for strategic bases.

T. ARMS SUPPLY

The increase in supply of sophisticated weapons to Syria during the year following the signing of the agreement centers on three categories: Mig-23 and Mig-25 aircraft (it is reported that Syria has Mig-27 and Mig-29 now) and T-72

tanks. In these three categories, the quantity supplied during the first year of the agreement reached approximately 60% of the total supplied during all the years that preceded the agreement. However, since delivery of all three weapons systems commenced no more than a year or two prior to the agreement, the actual increment after the agreement is in fact more or less identical to the annual rate of delivery in previous years. Therefore, the conclusion is: following the signing of a friendship and cooperation agreement between Syria and the USSR, the qualitative and quantitative increase in advanced Soviet weaponry in the Syrian army did not exceed what had been expected in any case.¹¹²

U. SYRIAN-SOVIET RELATIONS AFTER GORBACHEV ASCENSION TO POWER

On April 26, 1987, President Assad visited Moscow. Assad made his visit at a time when he began to appear less the leading figure than the leading obstruction to Soviet policy in the region, putting pressure on Soviet-Arab unity with his intrigue against Arafat and defying it with his alliance with

¹¹²All this information of the "Soviet-Syrian Friendship and Cooperation Treaty," quoted from Amiram Nir, The Soviet-Syrian Friendship and Cooperation Treaty: Unfulfilled Expectations, Tel Aviv, Tel Aviv University, 1983.

Iran against Iraq, who is also a major recipient of Soviet arms.¹¹³

Assad's visit could hardly have been pleasant, despite Soviet promises to heighten still further Syria's "defense potential" and warm rhetoric about mutual cooperation. Eager to play a larger role in the region, Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev reminded Assad in that visit that billions of dollars have been wasted on war in the region "without achieving anything". Between 1981-1985, Moscow provided Damascus with more than \$8 billion in weapons. Though the Soviets have written off some \$4 billion in economic loans to Damascus and re-scheduled its military debt at generous terms, they have also criticized Assad for his inept handling of the economy.¹¹⁴

The Soviets were putting conspicuous public pressure on Assad. Even as the Syrian president was meeting with Gorbachev, the Palestine National Council had convened in Algiers against Syria's strong objections. Some of the dissidents Assad had supported for years returned to Arafat's side despite Assad's efforts to keep them away. The Soviets had been strong supporters of the conference, and Assad was expected to endorse the process. The Soviet news agency

¹¹³Dickey, Christopher, "Assad and his Allies: Irreconcilable Differences," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 66, No. 1, Fall, 1987, p. 74.

¹¹⁴Chua-Eoan, Howard G., "Opening the Road to Damascus," *Time*, Section: World, July 20, 1987, p. 46.

reported him agreeing with Gorbachev on the need to restore the unity of the Palestinian resistance. But unity under Arafat's leadership could not have been what Assad had in mind. Adding insult to injury, the Soviets also made overtures to Israel while Assad was in Moscow. Assad, whose relations with Israel remain frozen in hostility, implicitly deplored the Soviet overtures by denouncing Israel.¹¹⁵

What appears the most remarkable twist in Assad's maneuvering occurred a few hours after he left the Soviet Union on April 27, 1987. At a remote air base in Jordan, Assad met with his most bitter rival, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. The timing of the Assad-Hussein meeting, only hours after Assad completed his visit to the Soviet Union, suggests that it took place under pressure from Moscow. Moscow appears to have demanded a series of gestures from Assad, and he was expected to comply. With regard to Moscow, it seems unlikely that Assad wants to do more than buy himself back a little breathing room and assert once more, quite clearly, his independence. Perhaps with this in mind, the Syrians have let it be known to the French and others that they are interested in diversifying their sources of supply for arms, moving away from their now almost total dependence on Soviet weaponry.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵Dickey Christopher, pp 73-74.

¹¹⁶Ibid., pp 74-75.

V. CONCLUSION

The Russians have dreamt for a long time to have a foothold in the Middle East. They have two main objectives in the region: a) to establish and protect their national interests; b) to promote their ideology.

The Soviets are skillful strategists and great opportunists. They seized the opportunity of the Arab-Israeli conflicts and allied themselves with the Arabs establishing their foothold in Syria since 1950. After each Arab-Israeli war, the Soviet influence emerged stronger and more influential.

The Soviets penetrated into Syria through three types of aids: a) political or diplomatic, b) military, and c) economic. The Soviets used their aids effectively in Syria and the Syrians are heavily indebted to the Soviets. Through their military aid, the Soviets emerged as an advocate of the Syrians national aspiration and were able to facilely exploit this position to the detriment of Western interests. Through their economic aid, the Soviets were able to deflect sometimes the Syrian policies in directions favorable to Soviet objectives, e.g. the Syrian endorsement of the Soviet role in Afghanistan.

On different occasions, the Soviets threatened to interfere militarily to back up Syria against its enemies.

The Syrians were pushed by the West to establish strong ties and relations with the Soviets. The Syrian objective of

this relation is to acquire advanced weapons from the Soviets to defeat Zionism.

In 1980, Syria concluded a treaty of friendship and co-operation with the Soviets hoping to bind the Soviets with military commitment. The Soviets evaded craftly to bind themselves militarily on the Syrian terms. Therefore, the treaty came out devoid of obligatory significance in the eyes of both signatories.

From the Soviet standpoint, the treaty served to institutionalize the relations and obligations which have been already established between the countries.

The quality and quantity of Soviet military aid to Syria after the treaty did not differ appreciably from the predictable and steady annual aid parameters established during the years which preceded the treaty.

Certainly, neither side can be taken for granted by the other. Syria will continue to pursue its interests on the basis of its own assessments, will not bend its foreign and defense policies to Soviet pressures or considerations, and will not assume in advance that in case of difficulties, it will receive Moscow's full backing. For its part, the Soviet Union will continue to decide anew at every opportunity on the parameters of support and backing it wishes to grant Damascus - without feeling obliged to provide aid according to Syrian expectations or demands.

Israel's confrontation with Syria continues to operate under the constraint of anticipated Soviet intervention preventing a decisive Israeli victory. Essentially, this constraint existed even in 1973; today, the probability of the Soviets realizing their intervention potential is higher.

Clearly, the web of relations between the USSR and Syria is far deeper and more complex than the ties analyzed in this paper. In seeking to understand the strategic considerations of highly centralized and closed regimes, there exists an obvious difficulty: the process of deliberation, planning and decisionmaking are concentrated in the hands of a few leaders; information on these matters is outside the public domain.

XVIII. THE UNITED STATES-SYRIAN RELATIONS

A. HISTORICAL ROOTS OF U.S.-SYRIAN AMITY

For approximately 400 years, the Ottomans ruled Syria with unlimited authority. Although impoverished by Ottoman rule, Syria continued to attract European traders who for centuries had transported spices, fruits and textiles from the Middle East to the West. With the traders from the West came missionaries, teachers, scientists and tourists whose governments began to clamor for certain rights. Among aforementioned intelligentsia were great American educators and missionaries.¹¹⁷

The influence of the Western intelligentsia on Arab thought in general and Syrian thought in particular was very great, productive and positive. By the mid 19th century, Syria began to experience nationalist stirrings which the Palestinian author George Antonius called an "Arab awakening". According to Antonius, the activities of American educators and missionaries helped fuel this awakening which began in 1847 with the founding in Beirut (then part of Syria) of a literary society under American aegis. American Protestant missionaries opened schools in various parts of Syria, the most famous being the American University of Beirut. "The missionaries," wrote Antonio, "put their shoulders with vigor

¹¹⁷Nyrop, Richard F., "Syria-A Country Study," 1978, p. 22.

to the task of providing an adequate literature." In that, they were the pioneers, and because of that, the intellectual effervescence, which marked the first stirrings of the Arab revival, owes most to their labors.¹¹⁸

The American productive activities toward Syria were not limited to the educational level but went beyond it to the political field. The King-Crane Commission is an American commission sent to the Middle East by President Wilson after World War I. The task of the Commission was to ascertain the desire of the populations "directly concerned" in the mandate system. Between May and July, 1919, King and Crane made a six weeks' tour of Syria and Palestine, held hearings, and on August 28, presented their report.

On the basis of their investigation, King and Crane recommended an American mandate for Syria, or as a second alternative, a British mandate, and a British mandate for Mesopotamia. The commissioners favored constitutional Arab monarchies under the mandatory system and fully endorsed Faisal, the son of Sheriff Hussein of Mecca, for the kingship of Syria. Furthermore, they voiced serious opposition to the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. They recommended "that only a greatly reduced Zionist program be attempted by the Peace Conference, and even that, only very gradually initiated,

¹¹⁸Seely, Talcott W., "U.S.-Arab Relations: The Syrian Dimension, 1985, p. 2.

that Palestine become part of a united Syrian state and that the holy places be internationalized."¹¹⁹

The Syrians made it clear to the King-Crane Commission that they did not want any foreign tutelage, but if it was going to be imposed upon them anyway, they would favor an American mandate.¹²⁰ In the U.S., Syrian Americans provided strong support for such a mandate. At the same time, the U.S. government was uninterested in becoming politically involved in Near Eastern affairs.¹²¹

This great American contribution in addition to President Wilson's advocacy of "self-determination", created a reservoir of goodwill among many Syrians. Up until the U.S. (actually President Truman made this decision, not the Departments of State and Defense) announced its support for the 1947 U.N. Partition Plan for Palestine and, thereafter, its recognition of the new State of Israel, the attitudes of most Syrians toward Americans were overwhelmingly positive.

B. SOURCES OF FRICTION: THE SYRIAN VIEW

The two main sources of friction between the U.S. and Syria are: a) Israel; b) Lebanon. All the political analysts agree that Zionism is the deadlock that poisoned the

¹¹⁹Lenczowski, George, p. 92.

¹²⁰Ibid., p. 315.

¹²¹Seely, Talcott, p. 2.

relations between the Arabs and the West. The stage for the first act in the American-Syrian drama was set on August 31, 1945, when President Truman addressed an appeal to the British Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, asking for immediate admission of 100,000 Jewish refugees to Palestine.¹²² On November 29, 1947, a date memorable in Jewish history, the General Assembly voted to recommend the partition of Palestine, with an economic union as proposed by the majority of its members.

Thirty-three states voted for this motion; 13 voted against and ten abstained. Among the big powers who favored partition were the United States, the Soviet Union and France.

The Arabs felt particularly resentful toward the United States since they believed it was this country whose presence or influence helped to rally enough votes for the partition. They also reproached Americans for "betraying" many promises made both by President Roosevelt and President Truman to the effect that no basic decision on Palestine would ever be taken without the agreement of both parties directly concerned.¹²³

Syria's tendency to question American credibility has been reinforced by the belief that the U.S. reneged on two agreements it negotiated with Syria. The first instance that Syrians cite is an alleged pledge made by President Carter to

¹²²Lenczowski, George, p. 404.

¹²³Ibid., p. 405.

President Assad in Geneva in 1977 to secure a regional peace settlement that would include a solution to the Palestine problem and the return, in whole or in part, of the Golan Heights. The second case concerns the Syrian-Israeli ceasefire agreement negotiated by Ambassador Philip Habib shortly after Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982. In January, 1949, the American government granted Israel full de jure recognition and appointed a well-known pro-Zionist, Dr. James G. McDonald, as first United States Ambassador in Tel-Aviv.

On September 10, 1952, the West German Republic agreed to pay Israel in the course of 14 years, \$822 million in goods as reparations for the damages inflicted upon European Jewry by the Nazi regime. For some time, Arab states contemplated an economic boycott of West Germany in reprisal, but eventually they desisted from doing so on the ground that, in their view, Germany was not a free agent in this transaction, having been prodded into it by the United States.¹²⁴

In January, 1950, Syria followed a tortuous path in its relations with the U.S., vacillating between negotiation concerning limited technical assistance and loud denunciations of Washington because of its pro-Israeli policy. In Syria, as in other Arab countries, there was a feeling of frustration and disenchantment regarding America. This caused some prominent members of the Syrian government to declare themselves

¹²⁴Ibid., p. 422.

publicly in favor of pro-Soviet policy. The recurrent theme of these statements was that the Arabs would rather become "Sovietized" than "Judaized" and that it was proper to collaborate with the Soviet Union as "an enemy of our enemy", i.e. of the United States, in the same way that the Arabs had collaborated with Nazi Germany as the enemy of Britain.¹²⁵ The United States legation's protests against the anti-American tenor of Syrian editorials in 1950 provoked an even stronger press campaign against what was termed American interference with the freedom of the press. Repeated pronouncements of American public figures about Israel as the "principal stronghold of democracy and American ideology" in the Middle East had the effect of keeping Syrian anger alive. On June 7, 1951, the Syrian Prime Minister Khalid el-Azem publicly rejected American technical aid under the Point Four Program.

On December 11, 1955, Israel attacked the Syrian outposts east of Lake Tiberias savagely. Fifty-six Syrian lives were lost. The pent-up resentments against Zionism and imperialism found new expression in the mass demonstrations that accompanied the burials of victims of Israeli aggression.¹²⁶ The anti-Western campaign reached its climax when ten political figures in Syria were put on trial on December 11, 1957, for participation in an "American plot" to overthrow the

¹²⁵Ibid., p. 331.

¹²⁶Ibid., p. 340.

government. During the trial, numerous witnesses testified to the deep involvement of American embassy personnel and intelligence agencies, citing names, dates and places.¹²⁷

On February 23, 1966, the left wing Ba'ath under the leadership of General Salah Jedid seized power in Syria. In the sector of foreign policy, the regime displayed considerable hostility toward the United States, largely because of its pro-Israeli stance, and, by the same token, favored more intimate relations with the Soviet Union and the socialist bloc.

On June 6, 1967, Israel attacked Egypt, Jordan and Syria and defeated them badly. Syria severed its diplomatic relations with the United States, Britain and West Germany for their support of Israel and Zionism according to the Syrian allegation.

In September, 1970, during the Jordanian civil war between King Hussein and Palestinian Fedayeen, Salah Jedid and his doctrinaire civilian allies in the Syrian government decided to intervene in that war against King Hussein and to this purpose they dispatched a tank brigade across the border to northern Jordan. There was a distinct possibility of escalation with the Soviet Union, the principal arms supplier of Syria, and the United States, the protector and backer of

¹²⁷Ibid., p. 344.

King Hussein, likely to intervene if their respective clients were to find themselves in serious difficulties.

On October 6, 1973, Egypt and Syria attacked Israel. During the first days of the war, Israel was defeated or precisely retreated before the Arabs, thanks to the massive airlift of weapons by the Americans which prevented the collapse of Israeli resistance. As a result of this massive aid, the United States designated by the Arab governments as the principal hostile power, was exposed to an oil embargo along with Portugal and Holland. The oil embargo gave Americans an occasion to consider the consequences of identification with Israel in terms of military security and economic well-being.

This is not the first time that American aid saved Israel. After the June war, the United States gradually became the main supplier of arms and military equipment to Israel, while continuing to provide generous economic assistance. The Congress repeatedly authorized deliveries of very sophisticated American weapons systems to Israel. The General Accounting Office (GAO) report on aid to Israel and Thomas Stauffer's article on United States aid to Israel estimate that the direct (economic and military) and indirect (investment, private borrowing, technology transfer) United States aid to Israel reached \$12 billion in 1983-1984. This would mean that each Israeli family of five received nearly \$20,000 each or, put another way, United States aid to Israel paid for all of Israel's imports. Such vast amounts of aid mean the

continued United States support of the industrial expansion of Israel and Israel's continued need for additional land and water resources.¹²⁸

The 1973 Arab-Israeli war was brought to a close by a final cease-fire on October 24. What followed was step-by-step diplomacy in which the United States played an active mediating role. On May 29, 1974, a disengagement agreement was concluded between Syria and Israel under American auspices. It provided for the retreat of Israeli forces from the additional areas captured in the course of the October War as well as from a certain stretch of the initially occupied Golan Heights and for a new demarcation line, again with a neutral zone separating the forces.

The signing of this disengagement agreement opened the way for a gradual restoration of relations between the United States and Syria, which had been severed after the 1967 war. In mid June, while on a tour of the Middle East, President Nixon paid a brief visit to Damascus and, two months later, the first American ambassador appeared in Syria after an interval of seven years. Furthermore, in a move calculated to restore a modicum of normalcy between the two countries, the United States in January, 1975 granted Syria \$25 million for development within the so-called Middle East Contingency

¹²⁸Current History, vol. 83, "Syria in the Maelstrom," by Robert Olson, January, 1984, pp 25-26.

Fund. It was the first financial aid extended by Washington to Damascus since 1965. In spite of this progress in peace-making and in restoring relations with the U.S., Syria's leadership looked with considerable distrust on what became known as America's "step-by-step" diplomacy. This policy aimed at the gradual achievement of a peace settlement in the Middle East by a series of separate agreements to be concluded in succession by Egypt, Syria and Jordan with Israel under American auspices. Syria's government feared that another step giving Egypt some gains in the Sinai Peninsula might reduce Egyptian eagerness to fight for broader Arab causes and, in particular, Egyptian willingness to defend the rights of Syria thus possibly leaving it alone to face the enemy.¹²⁹

Lebanon is another major source of friction between the U.S. and Syria. American policy towards Syria has witnessed over the past few years sudden shifts in different directions: from deep mutual suspicion to what could be described as normal diplomatic dialogue and then, again, to frustration and hostility and even the use of military force. These turnabouts have been the result of the dramatic and bloody events in Lebanon since the mid 1970s. Whereas American-Syrian relations evolved primarily in other contexts - super-power rivalry and the festering Arab-Israeli conflict - since

¹²⁹The bulk of the "U.S.-Syrian Relations" is quoted from Lenczowsky, Chapters VII, VIII, IX, X, XI.

1981, and more so since 1982, they have been inseparably intertwined with political and strategic developments in Lebanon. Paradoxically, it was precisely Syrian involvement in Lebanon since 1975 which created bridges between the two countries and helped, to a limited extent, to smooth relations between Washington and Damascus, but from 1982 onwards led to a straining of relations. Lebanon and Syria's involvement there eventually forced the U.S. to face some disturbing and always frustrating dilemmas regarding the use of American force as an instrument of foreign policy. Yet, it is again the situation in Lebanon that, ironically, recreated a new dialogue between the U.S. and Syria. This convoluted interaction between the two countries is all the more fascinating, as it involves relations between a superpower and a small regional power. As will be seen in this part, however, the power that has been more constrained in the use of its military capabilities was the United States.

C. AMERICAN POLICY ON LEBANON AND SYRIA'S ROLE

One after the other, American administrations have perceived the Lebanese situation as an issue of secondary importance. Until the outbreak of civil war in Lebanon in 1975 (and except for the brief intermezzo of the 1958 American intervention), Lebanon played a negligible role in American considerations. It is instructive to note that the main reason for the initial growth of American interest was

not the internal affairs or fate of Lebanon per se but rather the threat of another Syrian-Israeli war. Indeed, until 1982, Lebanon and its related problems continued to be treated by Washington as secondary to the larger issues of the Middle East: the Soviet encroachment, developments in the Gulf area and Israel's relations with the leading Arab states. Only with deepening American commitment to Amin-Jumayyil's regime did Lebanon itself become worthy of a major American initiative.

In the first stages of the Lebanese civil war which began in April, 1975, the Ford administration kept a low profile, with the obvious intention of maintaining the status quo in Lebanon. Because of the marginality of Lebanon in the American assessment of Middle Eastern problems, there was no readiness to get actively involved in resolving the difficult situation developing there. Thus, for example, although Kissinger reaffirmed U.S. "interest in Lebanon" in a letter to Prime Minister Rashid Karami on November 6, 1975, his phrasing clearly indicated America's disinclination to become directly involved.

American concern began to increase in September, 1975, when there were indications that Syria and Israel might intervene militarily in Lebanon. These signs prompted the U.S. to make clear its strong objection to any military moves by these other parties. On September 30, 1975, after a meeting between Kissinger and Foreign Minister Takla of Lebanon, the State Department issued a communique that served

as a warning to both Israel and Syria to refrain from military intervention.

The United States, however was preoccupied with far more important issues regarding the Middle East during 1975, the primary one being the search for further improvement in the Israeli-Egyptian relationship. In September, 1975, the U.S. succeeded in bringing the two to sign the Sinai-2 Agreement. That major move stabilized relations between Israel and Egypt and created together with Sinai-1, the foundation for Sadat's peace initiative in late 1977. It also led to a deeper division in the Arab World and to a great concern in Syria which felt isolated vis-a-vis Israel. Indeed, Syrian reaction to the agreement, to Egypt and to the U.S. was very hostile, which initially appeared to make the American-Syrian dialogue that had commenced a short time earlier that much more difficult.

Interestingly enough, however, the U.S. and Syria found ways soon afterwards of reaching some understanding with regard to Lebanon. This was accomplished by two complementary strategies: first, a parallel decision in both Damascus and Washington to "decouple" the Lebanese complex from the overall American-Syrian relationship; second, a shared effort to prevent the Sinai-2 Agreement from putting a halt to their general diplomatic dialogue. Thus, it appears, a Syrian compromise proposal presented to the Lebanese warring factions in December, 1975 received tacit or even explicit backing from the U.S.

January, 1976 became a critical month in the Lebanese civil war after the Christian leadership had rejected Syria's proposal. There was a major escalation in military activity, accompanied by Christian threats to partition the country. The deteriorating situation forced Syria to become even more active in attempting to manage the situation. First, Syrian Foreign Minister Khadam threatened intervention; subsequently, intensive Syrian diplomatic activity took place in Beirut. Syria worked out a new formula with Lebanon's President Faranjiyyah for political reform that accommodated some of the demands of the Muslim-radical Palestinian coalition (the National Front) while basically maintaining the political system of the country. By late January, the Christian forces that were cooperating within the framework of the Lebanese Front accepted this proposal.

Khadam's threats of intervention raised concern in Israel, which had by then developed a strategy of deterrence against Syrian military intervention in Lebanon. To forestall the danger of direct military confrontation between the two regional powers, the United States adopted a complex strategy; on the one hand, Washington kept signalling its opposition to hasty and extreme moves by either Syria or Israel. On the other hand, the administration tried to delineate areas of shared interest in Lebanon between the two regional powers. Thus, a complex three-actor game developed: Syria, diplomatically active in Lebanon, also kept signalling the

possibility of military intervention, yet sought indirect or tacit endorsement by the U.S. for such a move. That endorsement, though, had to include Israel's "acceptance". Israel, on its part, issued deterrence threats against any Syrian military intervention, yet began signalling its readiness to accept some Syrian military move, provided it was conducted within specific limits. The U.S. became one of the main channels through which Israel and Syria communicated their intentions.

Israeli readiness to "accept" some Syrian intervention crystallized once it became apparent in February-April, 1976 that, frustrated by Muslim-Palestinian opposition to its diplomatic efforts, Syria had turned against the latter and sided with the Christians. The U.S. communicated to Syria the Israeli "red lines" defining the limits of Syrian intervention.

The Syrian invasion of Lebanon that began on the night of May 31 until October certainly succeeded in constraining the National Front and in imposing some order in the country. A state of controlled semi-anarchy persisted, but there was no recurrence of the civil war. Thus, one American objective had been secured: the instability in Lebanon was reduced and there appeared to be no threat of a new round of escalation. This impressed upon the administration in Washington the view that Syrian activity in Lebanon was basically of a stabilizing nature. More important from the American point of view was

the success of the Israeli-Syrian tacit understanding about the deployment and use of force in Lebanon. To be sure, that success was due in the first place to the coincidental recognition by both regional powers that the costs involved in a military confrontation far outweighed the benefits. Nevertheless, the U.S. was active in contributing to that calculus and came to view it as an important asset.

Throughout the Carter presidency (1977-80), the U.S. continued to see Syria's role in Lebanon as a stabilizing one. Syria, however, vehemently opposed the Camp David accord, regarding it as leading to its total isolation. There is no doubt that the forceful American role in the Camp David treaty exacerbated differences between Washington and Damascus.

D. REAGAN'S MIDDLE EAST POLICY

A much more pronounced change in American-Syrian relations appeared with the coming to power of the Reagan administration in January, 1981. From the outset, that administration adopted a strongly anti-Soviet posture. Indeed, the conflict with the USSR became the main organizing principle of American policy in regard to the Middle East. To be sure, the Carter administration, under the impact of the fall of the Shah, the miserable episode of the hostages in Tehran, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, had already begun to formulate a new Middle East policy. One element was the creation of the

Rapid Deployment Force (later to be renamed Rapid Joint Deployment Force), another, the formation of the Carter Doctrine for defending the Gulf area against a possible Soviet attack. There were also the beginnings of an attempt to create a new set of regional defense arrangements in coordination with America's regional friends.

The Reagan administration strongly emphasized these policies and, in some respects, went beyond them. The first and guiding assumption of Reagan's Middle East policy was that the main danger faced by the U.S. in that region was the extension of Soviet influence in the Persian Gulf. Secondly, the Arab-Israeli conflict, now perceived as less salient and destabilizing than had previously been assumed, was to receive less attention. American efforts were to focus on the more urgent problems in the Gulf. Reagan did not change past American principles for the ultimate resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict - that is, an Israeli territorial withdrawal in exchange for peace; in this respect, the Camp David process remained important. But the Reagan administration perceived that the momentum could be maintained with a lower investment of American effort. The third element of the new U.S. policy, directly related to the first two, consisted of a conceptual division between the Gulf area and the Arab-Israeli conflict. It was assumed that the systems of interaction among states in these two areas were separate and that there was little spill-over between them. Hence, the two

areas lent themselves to separate American policies. Given this assumption and the assumed urgency of any threat to American interests in the Persian Gulf, it was decided that the U.S. could neglect the Arab-Israeli conflict area and concentrate instead on the Persian Gulf.

Fourth, the Reagan administration assumed that the foreign policies of regional powers were primarily organized around the question of East-West relations. According to this conception, which to a certain extent underlay much of the Reagan approach, regional problems were of only secondary importance to Middle Eastern leaders; decisionmakers in Riyadh, Cairo and Jerusalem were preoccupied with the Soviet threat. Conversely, Syria's behavior was directed by the Soviet Union.

Finally, and in the specific context of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the administration harbored strong animosity towards the PLO. In contrast to the Carter approach, the Reagan administration was adamant in its condemnation of international terrorism; it viewed the PLO as a threat, not only within the Middle East, but also in the world at large.

The main operational conclusion from these assumptions was the attempt to build a new regional defense organization oriented to the West. This policy, which had been initiated under Carter, was christened the "strategic consensus", and its main objective was to defend the Gulf region. The policy seemed to the Americans to possess great potential; it promised to free American foreign policy from involvement in

the entangling complexities of intraregional disputes and, at the same time, to catch all client states in the inclusive sweep of an anti-Soviet axis. A second operational conclusion, which again was a continuation of a Carter initiative, was the accelerated build-up of the RJDF. Finally, in direct contrast to the Carter approach, there emerged a certain neglect of the Arab-Israeli issue and, primarily, of the Camp David process.

The U.S. policy soon ran into major problems. Haig's visit to the Middle East in April, 1981, which was supposed to lay the foundations of the "strategic consensus", led to a series of disappointments. Regional leaders, although concerned about Soviet threat, emphasized nevertheless problems of a more regional nature. The Saudis talked about the Palestinian problem and the dangers emanating from revolutionary Iran. Israeli leaders were primarily concerned with Syrian behavior in Lebanon. In addition, the Americans witnessed in this period a series of Israeli actions, some of them provocative, that seemed to demonstrate the potency of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Of importance in this context were the Israeli, Maronite and Syrian actions and over-reactions in the April, 1981 missile crisis, Israel's limited incursion into Lebanon in the summer of 1981, the attack on the Iraqi nuclear reactor and the Israeli annexation of the Golan Heights.

By early 1982, it had become clear that the sweeping "strategic consensus" could not in itself obtain all of Washington's regional goals for the Middle East; there remained the necessity for a more traditional, if more complex, approach in dealing with the intrinsic conflicts and problems of the region. In particular, the Arab-Israeli conflict required more attention. Furthermore, the distinction that had been drawn between the Persian Gulf and the Arab-Israeli conflict zones now seemed to be less valid. The operational outcome of these conceptual readjustments was to devote energy to the Camp David accord and, most urgent of all, to secure the last phase of the Israeli withdrawal from Sinai. Indeed, Haig's visit to the Middle East in early 1982 was designed to underline America's continued interest in the Camp David process. The American view had certainly undergone a change; however, they remained in flux and lacked focus and coherence.

E. AMERICAN-SYRIAN RELATIONS AND THE 1982 WAR

The Reagan administration's initial attempts to build a Middle Eastern "strategic consensus" added to the growing animosity between Syria and the U.S. Even the successful American effort in April-May, 1981 to stop Israel from attacking Syrian missiles in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley did not improve Washington's worsening relations with Damascus. By early 1982, the situation was described by one American official as

having reached its nadir. Since 1973, U.S. policy on Lebanon also had developed an anti-Syrian strain in its emphasis on the need for the complete withdrawal of all foreign forces (meaning also Syrian) from Lebanon and the formation of a "strong central government".

The change in attitude should now be placed within the general context of American policy towards the Middle East. By 1982, two variants of that policy had developed, each sharing the same basic assumptions mentioned earlier regarding the Soviet threat and ways to handle it, but different in its assessment of the relative importance of Israel and the Arab states to American interests. One group of decisionmakers, led by Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger, emphasized the importance of the moderate Arab states, primarily Saudi Arabia. The other group, led by Secretary State Haig, emphasized Israel's role as an important asset for the U.S. To be sure, the difference here was more a question of emphasis than a manifestation of different policies. Nevertheless, it had its impact on specific decisions during the evolving crisis in Lebanon.

It should be noted that below the level of decisionmakers, most American officials who dealt specifically with Syria and Lebanon saw the solution to the Lebanese equation as lying firmly within an Arab context. They assumed that a concerted Arab effort, led by Saudi Arabia, would ultimately bring about Syrian withdrawal and the formation of a strong independent Lebanese government.

While American views of the Syrian role in Lebanon were changing, the concern over an Israel-Syrian military confrontation remained high, since such a conflict might result in uncontrolled escalation and possibly even lead to a superpower crisis. Notwithstanding, the Reagan administration's firm anti-Soviet posture and rhetoric, a direct crisis with the Soviet Union was regarded as undesirable and dangerous. In this attitude, the Reagan administration was following the behavior pattern of previous administrations: deterrence of Soviet military initiatives in the Middle East coupled with caution and a "crisis management" approach. Hence, the American efforts to dissuade Israel from striking at Syrian missiles in the Bekaa Valley in April, 1981, and to stop Israel from invading Lebanon at several points in time between December, 1981 and June, 1982.

Once the war in Lebanon did break out on June 6, 1982, the U.S. adopted a "damage limitation" approach limiting the cost of negative reactions from America's Arab allies, especially Saudi Arabia and Egypt; minimizing Soviet inroads into the Arab World; and avoiding the danger of an American-Soviet crisis. Together with this strategy, there was also a recognition of the possible benefits of this war. Although the U.S. was not in collusion with Israel in regard to the latter's 'big plan' in Lebanon, the war presented the possibility of implementing American political objectives: withdrawal of all foreign forces - Syrians and the PLO (and

of course the Israelis, as well) - and the establishment of a strong central government. Indeed, Haig defined these American objectives soon after the war started. Another beneficial consequence seemed to be the blow to Soviet prestige in the Middle East resulting from a Syrian and PLO set-back.

During the first few days of the war, an ambiguity persisted regarding its scope. When Israel assured the U.S. that it intended to implement only its "little plan", a military confrontation between Israel and Syria appeared to be avoidable, giving American diplomacy room to maneuver. The U.S. pursued its diplomacy in Lebanon primarily through the mediation of Philip Habib, who arrived in Israel on the second day of the war. His first task was to mediate between Israel and Syria. On June 8, he carried an Israeli ultimatum to Damascus; but even before he met with President Assad, the Israelis had launched their strike against Syria in the Bekaa.

Immediate American efforts ensued at the highest level to secure a cease-fire, prompted by the fear that the "damage limitation" strategy might collapse because of Israeli-Syrian military escalation. A Soviet note delivered to President Reagan, though relatively moderate in tone, nevertheless injected a feeling of further grave consequences at the superpower level. Moreover, Arab criticism of the Israeli operation and what appeared to be American acquiescence to it was mounting. By Friday, June 11, the U.S. succeeded in forcing

Israel to accept a general cease-fire. In fact, however, fighting ended only in the eastern sector where the main Syrian units had been engaged by Israel. Battles continued in the western and central sectors, where Israel fought both PLO and Syrian units. These were areas not directly affecting the area always considered strategically crucial to Syria, the Bekaa Valley.

After mediation lasting about ten weeks and conducted against the background of the Israeli siege of Beirut, the U.S. succeeded in securing an agreement for the withdrawal of PLO and Syrian forces from Beirut. The negotiations were conducted with the participation of many parties, Syria being one of the main actors. At the time of the negotiations, the Syrian position was relatively weak. Syria had suffered a limited military defeat (primarily in the air); it had failed to mobilize meaningful Arab support; and its political allies in Lebanon had either suffered military defeat or, as in the case of Lebanon's President Sarkis and part of the Maronite community, lowered the profile of their relationship. Against that background, Syria became more flexible and eventually agreed to the American plan.

Prior to the Beirut agreement, American-Syrian negotiations seemed to have created a somewhat relaxed medium for overall American-Syrian relations. Yet, subsequent events changed that mistaken perception. The U.S. became involved in a series of policy steps and initiatives that appeared

threatening to Syrian decisionmakers. At the same time, Syria gradually strengthened its position in Lebanon and vis-a-vis Israel. The combination of these developments precluded, for the time being, the possibility of a meeting of purpose between the U.S. and Syria.

The Beirut agreement created a new peace-keeping force - the Multinational Force (MNF) - of which the American contingent was the largest. Deployed in Beirut, the MNF withdrew after a while, but returned following the massacre in September by Phalangist troops of Palestinians in the Sabra and Shatilla refugee camps and the Israeli withdrawal from West Beirut. At that time, the U.S. assumed a posture of deep commitment to a specific policy regarding Lebanon. As mentioned earlier, the U.S. had never considered Lebanon to be of much intrinsic political or strategic interest. By autumn 1982, that position had changed. The U.S. now became involved in Lebanon per se and developed a commitment to the new regime headed by Amin Jumayyil. The new policy was not the result of a change in the relative strategic importance of Lebanon, rather it was a combination of external factors and the dynamics of intervention and commitment. By that time, American-Syrian relations had become completely dependent on developments in Lebanon.

The position of the U.S. was that Syrian forces should withdraw from Lebanon as a part of a general plan for the withdrawal of all foreign troops. Next, the U.S. assumed the

role of the main external backer of Amin Jumayyil's regime in Beirut. In order to accomplish its new objectives in Lebanon, the U.S. pressed ahead with negotiations to secure an agreement between Israel and Lebanon. It was assumed - wrongly as it turned out - that following such an agreement, negotiations would begin with Syria and that Syria would be ready to withdraw, as well. The American diplomats relied on several rationales for this assumption. For one thing, Syria had repeatedly declared a willingness to withdraw once Israel had done so and given a request of the Lebanese government. Second, it seemed that the Syrian presence in Lebanon involved Syria in high costs, especially after the Israeli deployment along the Lebanese-Syrian border at a distance of only 20-odd kilometers from Damascus. Since the Syrians were apprehensive over the possibility of an Israeli shelling of Damascus, a symmetrical Israeli-Syrian withdrawal would seem to offer Syria a clear dividend. Finally, the U.S. trusted Saudi Arabia to exploit its position as Syria's main financial backer in persuading the Syrians to evacuate Lebanon.

The Americans decided, therefore, that priority should be given to negotiations between Israel and Lebanon and that its own negotiations with Syria be postponed to a later stage. This proved to be a grave tactical mistake. The Israeli-Lebanese talks finally culminated in the agreement of May 17, 1983, and it appeared as if the next stage would be relatively easy to accomplish. And indeed, Israel declared its readiness

to withdraw completely from Lebanon. Syria was now expected to follow suit, in consonance with previous declarations. But here lay a fundamental misunderstanding of Syrian interests.

By mid 1983, it had become clear that for Israel the costs of deployment in Lebanon were beginning to outweigh by far the benefits. Syria was keenly aware of this change. In addition, Syria's perceived need of maintaining a military presence in the Bekaa Valley, and the considerable political influence it enjoyed throughout Lebanon as a result, made Syrian willingness to withdraw fully less and less keen. Finally, the Israeli-Lebanese agreement included several elements that clearly affected Syrian interests adversely. The Syrians, consequently, became convinced that the U.S. was backing a strategy that would allow Israel a prominent position in Lebanon. Unable to tolerate this possibility, Damascus proceeded to frustrate its negotiations with Washington by delay tactics, and maintaining persistent ambiguity. These tactics, in turn, deepened American suspicions concerning Syria's true objectives in Lebanon. The obstinate Syrian position was also influenced by the internal situation in Lebanon itself. The Lebanese opposition, made of Shi'ites, Druzes, the Sunni elite of the Tripoli area and even some Christian notables (most prominently, Faranjiyyah), refused to accept Amin Jumayyil's plans. Frustrated by his inability to bring about political reform, they formed a tactical alliance. Their natural external backer was Syria. In addition, the

deployment of a Soviet-manned air-defense system increased Syrian deterrence against any military move by Israel and thus boosted Syria's self-confidence.

The change in the Syrian position on withdrawal, together with the aid it extended to groups opposing Jumayyil's government in mid 1983, led to a change in the American perception of the Israeli role in Lebanon. Washington had seen the potential Israeli threat to Syria as an important bargaining card in the negotiations with Assad. But by the summer of 1983, it had also become clear that the Israeli withdrawal from parts of Lebanon would enable the opposition forces in these regions to coalesce and turn against the central government. An ironic paradox now emerged: Israel, becoming less and less enchanted with its role in the area, was anxious to withdraw, at least from the Shouf mountains. On the other hand, both Jumayyil and the U.S. were eager for Israel to extend its stay there.

F. THE DILEMMA OF THE USE OF FORCE

When Israel eventually withdrew from Shouf in September, 1983, and Druze and Shi'ite units subsequently began pushing towards Beirut, the U.S. was forced to contemplate the possibility of the direct use of force in defense of the Lebanese government. By that time, the Americans had assembled a considerable force off the shores of Lebanon to back up its MNF contingent of marines in Beirut. Washington's high military

profile was intended to signal American commitment and resolve to the Jumayyil government. It was, however a passive military posture and soon proved untenable. When Druze units, backed by PLO fighters and Syrian artillery, attacked Souk al-Garb, the suburb controlling the southeastern entrance to Beirut, it placed Lebanese army units in a precarious situation, and then the U.S. decided to use limited force. American naval units opened fire and helped block the advance on Beirut.

The U.S. attempted to delineate parameters for its use of force; the basic posture was one of defense and deterrence; accordingly, direct attacks on the marines or infringement of a "red line" around Beirut would be met with measured responses. Major problems arose in the application of this policy. Military actions against the American forces, such as the bombing of marine headquarters in Beirut that killed 240 men, aroused the urge for revenge beyond the measured pursuit of defense and deterrence. The problem was that the identify of factions acting against the marines was often difficult to establish; similarly, Syrian involvement in these attacks was indirect and seemed not to provide grounds for retaliation. Furthermore, whereas operations against the Syrians might perhaps be helpful in the negotiations, their political cost would be considerable. Consequently, the American response was primarily periodic heavy naval shelling of areas from which fire had been directed at Beirut or at

the American units themselves. The targets were mainly Druze and Shi'ite militia units or, in rare instances, Syrian artillery. In only one case did American aircraft go on the attack, striking at Syrian SAM deployments.

In the final analysis, it seemed that American military force would be unable to obtain Washington's objectives in Lebanon. Amin Jumayyil proved inept in bringing about national reconciliation, and Syria's backing of opposition groups undermined the government. In such circumstances, the rapid translation of American force into political assets seemed impossible. Washington was forced, once again, to reconsider its interests and strategy in Lebanon.

The starting point for the Reagan administration's reconsiderations was the recognition that, whereas the American military presence in Beirut served as a guarantee the Jumayyil government would not fall, the actual application of military force could not coerce the majority of Lebanese to back the central government. Moreover, as unpalatable as the thought was, the U.S. had to recognize the painful fact that Syria could play a useful role in the slow and tortuous process of reaching an accommodation among Lebanon's warring communities. This recognition developed only gradually against the background of U.S. public displeasure at the uncertainty of purpose surrounding the deployment of the marines in Beirut. Perhaps even more important than the sway of public opinion was the old-new recognition that Lebanon was not an important

interest for the U.S. There was no point in shedding blood and being involved in a messy and sordid domestic situation, when no clear advantage in terms of hard interests could be secured.

Thus, the U.S. decided to pull its contingent of marines out of Beirut and to lower the profile of her commitment to Jumayyil. This development contributed to and was in turn affected by Jumayyil's decision to renew the old alliance between the Maronites and the Syrians.

Therefore, from mid 1984, the U.S. returned, at least partly, to her 1976 policy. American officials reached the conclusion that Syria could contribute more to the stability of the central regime in Beirut than an American military presence, so much so, that one official went as far as to suggest that the Syrian role could be considered "helpful" within the context of Lebanon.

American-Syrian relations will probably be affected by the Lebanese context for some time to come. But with the decline in importance of Lebanon in American considerations about the Middle East, Syria will probably be perceived increasingly within more important contexts: superpower competition and the future of the Arab-Israeli conflict.¹³⁰

¹³⁰ This part, the "United States-Syrian Relations in Lebanon" is wholly quoted from Yair Evron, "Washington, Damascus and the Lebanon Crisis," in Syria under Assad, edited by Moshe Maoz and Avner Yaniv, St. Martin Press, New York, 1986, pp 209-222.

G. SOURCES OF FRICTION: THE AMERICAN VIEW

Official U.S. attitudes toward Syria have been critical and uncomplimentary. Here are some of the salient American grievances against Syria:

1. Syria's media and official spokesmen including Assad have continuously indulged in hyperbole, bombast and sloganeering against the U.S. The rhetoric, regularly reported by the American media, has led American public to liken President Assad to Libya's Qadhafi.

2. Another important source of U.S. grievance against Syria is the misperception that Syria is a Soviet satellite, a kind of Middle Eastern Cuba.

3. Another reason for U.S. anti-Syrian attitudes is a belief that the ideological orientation of Syria is leftist, even neo-Marxist.

4. Another reason for official U.S. negative feelings toward Damascus has been the perception that Syria opposes peace with Israel, especially the 1982 Reagan peace initiative. (At the time of writing this paper, the news showed that Syria cooperated with Secretary of State Shultz concerning his recent peace initiative, NBC, CBC American news.)

5. U.S. anti-Syrian attitudes have also been influenced by heavy-handed and intemperate actions by the Assad regime. The most spectacular example was the February, 1982 killing of some 15,000 members of the Muslim Brotherhood banned party by security forces in Hama.

6. Another action which provoked official U.S. concern was the sudden massing of Syrian troops on the Jordanian border during an Arab summit meeting in Amman in late 1980.

7. Syria's alliance with the Khomeni regime further tarnished the image of Damascus in the U.S.¹³¹

¹³¹For more details of Sources of Friction between the U.S. and Syria, see Talcott Seely, "U.S.-Arab Relations: The Syrian Dimension," 1985, p. 15.

XIX. CONCLUSIONS

To politicians and cartographers, Syria is an invention of the 20th century. To scholars and to the Syrians, however, the term also refers to a once vast, occasionally powerful, always proud empire.

When Syria became independent in 1946, she was in many respects a state without being a nation-state, a political entity without being a political community. As with so many countries born in the past 50 years, Syria's modern history has been a saga of coups and countercoups. From 1946 to 1958, the traditional Syrian politicians put Syria for adoption and squabbled and wrangled among each other for selecting the proper foster parent. In 1958, Egypt's President Gamal Abdel Nasser won the bid and merged his country with Syria to form the United Arab Republic but the union lasted only three and one half years. In 1963, the Arab Socialist Resurrection (Ba'ath) Party overthrew President Nazem Koudsi and seized power in Damascus.

After leading a bloodless coup in 1970, Hafez Assad took over. He has trod through the carnage of Middle Eastern politics with the cunning and stealth of a big cat. He fought the Yom Kipper War and signed a disengagement agreement with Israel over the Golan Heights in 1974. He sent his army into Lebanon in 1976 to save the Maronite Christians from defeat by the PLO and a coalition of leftist Muslim forces. He told

Time Correspondent Wilton Wynn in 1977 that he was ready to make peace with the Israelis if they would withdraw from the territory they had captured in the 1967 war. He sabotaged the Lebanese-Israeli peace treaty that the U.S. brokered. He was disenchanted with U.S. diplomacy and believed that foreigners had trifled with Syria long enough. He established himself as a regional power broker indicating that anyone wanting to accomplish something in the Middle East would have to deal with him. According to one Middle East insider in Washington, Assad told the American envoy Bud McFarlane, "When the feathers hit the fan, your Egyptian and Jordanian buddies cannot help you whereas I can." Why did Assad come through? "He wants to be recognized as the most important power broker in the Middle East, someone who must be dealt with if anything is to be done," says a White House senior aide, noting that Assad had no place in the Camp David Agreement, or the Shultz-engineered Lebanon-Israel accord of May, 1983, or in the current Hussein-Mubarak-Arafat effort.¹³²

The Syrian Goals. The standard articulation of Syria's long-term aspirations, be it by President Assad, one of his more prominent colleagues or through the official organs of the Ba'ath Party, suggests limitless or at least exceedingly far-reaching goals. Syria, according to such proclamations,

¹³²National Review, "Letter from Washington," July 26, 1985, p. 14.

wishes to consolidate its society, its economy and its political structure, with a view to casting a long shadow over the entire Middle East. Such statements of the country's goals imply a relentless drive towards the creation of a Greater Syria. If such aspirations, which are normally presented as if they are not a matter of either choice or necessity but something amounting to a historical and moral imperative, were realized, Syria would become the single most important factor in Middle Eastern regional politics. She would dominate the Arab League. She would succeed in offsetting the overbearing influence of Egypt. She would be in an excellent position to realize the dreams of pan-Arabism, she would advance Arabism, and she would advance the Arab World towards the grandeur and status it has always sought in the World arena.¹³³

What the Syrians want is precisely what nationalists have always wanted in every part of the world: an integrated (Syrian) society, which is industrialized, modernized, centralized, socialized and populated by proud and spirited masses who enjoy benefits of economic prowess and who are capable of sustaining independence in the anarchic, chronically unstable, pervasively violent and breathtakingly convulsive Middle East. Assad's predecessors in Syria, especially

¹³³Moshe Maoz and Avner Yaniv, "The Syrian Paradox," in Syria under Assad, pp 251-252.

leaders such as Adib Shishaqli, may have ultimately shared the same vision. But under Hafez al-Assad, this vague and distant dream seems to have been converted, with dogged determination and impressive skill, into a tangible, operationally palpable agenda, which, in spite of formidable constraints, has already begun to be implemented.¹³⁴ Assad's regime won a series of impressive domestic and external successes. Following a long period of endemic instability in Syrian politics, Assad succeeded in establishing a comparatively stable and coherent regime. True, the underlying sources of past instability were not fully eliminated and the urban Sunni population continued to denounce the regime as the illegitimate rule of a sectarian Alawi group. But the effective domestic strategy formulated by Assad, his personal leadership, the aura of success and the unprecedented cohesiveness of the new ruling group served to cushion and mitigate the effect of such destabilizing factors.

This domestic success served as a solid foundation for the regime's foreign policy which contributed, in turn, to the regime's prestige and legitimacy.¹³⁵ Assad has become the strongman of the Middle East. The more the United States opposes him, the stronger he becomes, albeit at the price of

¹³⁴Ibid., p 253.

¹³⁵Rabinovich, Itamar, "The Foreign Policy of Syria: Goals, Capabilities, Constraints and Options," Survival, vol. 24, JL/Ag, 1982, p. 175.

moving ever closer to his great protector, the Soviet Union. He has no serious rivals, at the moment. As it was mentioned earlier, he has fought his way to the top largely by negative means, by blocking or destroying rivals, by derailing agreements that did not include him or that gave him a lesser place than he felt entitled to, and above all, by incredible tenacity against severe odds and strong enemies.

Negative acts are not sufficient to give Assad the position of supreme leader, the "Arab hero" role that Abdul Nasser and Anwar Sadat sought in vain. For that, a great positive act will be necessary, which would obviously be to tackle successfully the Arab-Israeli problem. Assad will not be in a great hurry to approach that goal. His style has been gradual, methodical, detailed preparation by intricate maneuvers combining daring action with a desire to take minimal risks. What remains to be seen is whether, in the event he lasts long enough, he will try to deal with that supreme problem by taking the road of war or diplomacy. There are grave risks involved in both.¹³⁶ "No war is possible without Egypt, and no peace is possible without Syria," Henry Kissinger once said. It is a measure of how far Syria has come under Hafez Assad; while

¹³⁶Neuman, Robert G., "Assad and the Future of the Middle East," Foreign Affairs, vol. 62, Winter 83/84, p. 253.

the first part of that statement is no longer completely valid, the last part rings truer than ever.¹³⁷

United States diplomacy has little choice but to face up to the vastly changed situation in the Middle East. Both Syria and the U.S. should have an interest in gradually improved relations in order to give the Syrians an option other than total and exclusive dependence upon the Soviet Union. This might worry Israel but might not be totally unacceptable provided American diplomacy proceeds with care, skill and balance.¹³⁸ The possibility of such diplomacy would also be enhanced if the U.S. government takes Nahum Goldman's advice to President Jimmy Carter. Nahum Goldman traveled to Washington to meet the President. Cyrus Vance, Zbigniew Brzezinski and Mark Siegel were also present as the 82-year-old Zionist leader and former head of the World Jewish Congress offered his own experienced and very candid opinion on how the Carter administration might best pursue its peace efforts in the Middle East. Goldman urged them to "break the Jewish lobby in the United States."¹³⁹ On ABC News Meet the Press, the former President Richard Nixon similar advice.

¹³⁷Kelly, James, Time, December 19, 1983, p. 34.

¹³⁸Neuman, Robert G., p. 255.

¹³⁹Tivnan, Edward, "The Lobby", Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1987, pp 120-121.

President Nixon said, "Israel should be pressured for achieving a just peace in the Middle East."¹⁴⁰

The dramatic ideological, political and economic changes which swept Eastern Europe at the end of 1989 and the beginning of 1990, in addition to the ongoing thaw in superpower relations convinced President Assad that we are living in a changing world and in a changing time. The erosion of U.S.-Soviet bipolarity and the improving East-West climate made the two superpowers review their priorities. As part of that rapprochement, Washington and Moscow have backed away from unstinting support of their respective allies in the Middle East. The superpower retreat has had the most dramatic impact on Syria and Israel. U.S. officials speak of a "rough symmetry" between Moscow's announced intention to draw down its military support for Syria and Washington's cooling approach toward Israel. In Damascus, Moscow's moderating attentions have curbed President Assad's hopes of achieving strategic parity with Israel. In the past the Soviets funneled enough hardware into Syria to leave the country with a \$15 billion military debt; now Moscow speaks of Assad's need for "reasonable defensive sufficiency."

As a skillful statesman, President Assad had already prepared himself for such a terrible shock. To that end, he has been cultivating a more moderate image in the West. In

¹⁴⁰ ABC News, "Meet the Press", April 10, 1988.

March, 1990, he told former U.S. President Jimmy Carter that he was ready to enter into bilateral negotiations with Israel. He has been working arduously to improve and project the Syrian humanitarian image by helping the release of some of the Western hostages in Lebanon. Former U.S. President Ronald Reagan and President George Bush thanked him for his efforts. President Bush announced that "good actions beget good actions." President Assad definitely is waiting for President Bush to translate his rhetoric words by substantial tangible deeds.¹⁴¹

Peace in the Middle East remains a vital and necessary concern for America, the entire West, and for Japan, which depends so much on that region's strategic importance and resources. America's goodwill to approach that goal has been strong, but its skill and ability to play a constructive role has not been much in evidence. Any American President's policy cannot possibly succeed without a strategy that bears priorities and realities firmly in mind. Among those realities are the continued central importance of the Palestinian problem and the need for successive American administrations to view Middle Eastern problems in a regional rather than a predominantly East-West context.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹"Stumbling Toward Armageddon?," Time, World, April 16, 1990.

¹⁴²Neuman, Robert G., p. 255.

At last, but not least, the Arabs and the Israelis should recognize the full scale of the military tragedy that affects both sides. It is a tragedy that has no end that will favor either side. Time and the arms race are not on anyone's side, and God is neither Israel's estate agent nor the Arab World's general.¹⁴³

¹⁴³Cordesman, Anthony H., "The Middle East and the Cost of the Politics of Force," The Middle East Journal, vol. 40, No. 1, Winter 1986, p. 8.

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